

A CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONS' PERSUASIVE EFFORTS WITH THE
SYRIAN OPPOSITION

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Abstract

This case study compared a Switzerland based non-governmental organization (NGO) and a U.S. based NGO's persuasive efforts with the Syrian armed opposition to cease their practice of killing and harming civilians (civilian targeting). The Swiss NGO portion entailed in-depth interviews with staff and a training partner as well as a qualitative content analysis of campaign videos, training booklets and modules, a conference report, a strategy document, and opposition authored code of conduct documents. The U.S. NGO portion involved an in-depth interview with an expert from its Middle East office and a qualitative content analysis of organizational press releases, full reports, and letters as well as opposition authored letters to the U.S. NGO. The findings revealed that the Swiss and U.S. NGOs had some similar approaches including utilizing some of the same social media channels, advocating costs for committing civilian targeting, and emphasizing their neutrality in their organizations' portrayal. Alternatively, other aspects of their approaches differed such as the degree to which they relied on interpersonal networks and written communiqués as channels, if they primarily leveraged direct messaging or both direct and indirect messaging, if they emphasized the benefits of ceasing civilian targeting, how they leveraged partnerships, and their commitment strategies. The Swiss NGO's dissemination channels included meetings and trainings that incorporated techniques such as role playing, campaign videos, and booklets; future channels will leverage mobile apps and card games. The U.S. NGO's channels comprised written communiqués, *Al Arabiya*, *Al Jazeera*, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Both NGOs addressed the opposition's hostile attitudes towards civilian Alawites and civilian regime supporters. The Swiss NGO directly messaged opposition

groups and tailored messages to a group's views of international and Islamic laws; messages stressed the costs of committing civilian targeting and the benefits of ceasing the behavior. Alternatively, the U.S. NGO directly messaged opposition groups about the costs of civilian targeting and indirectly messaged certain opposition groups, by reaching out to third parties, such as Gulf states, with perceived influence on these groups on ways to inflict costs on them for their civilian targeting. Both NGOs placed a priority on portraying their neutrality. The Swiss NGO relied on local Syrian partners to gain access and build trust with opposition groups, while the U.S. NGO leveraged partnerships to bolster messaging around the costs of civilian targeting. Additionally, the Swiss NGO, adopting a long-term approach, used formal and informal commitment strategies depending on the opposition group. The U.S. NGO presented opposition groups with opportunities to make public written commitments to stop their civilian targeting. Finally, various recommendations are offered for communication practitioners seeking to influence the opposition and similar armed non-state actors including: employing channels such as interpersonal networks, *Al Arabiya*, *Al Jazeera*, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; segmenting opposition audiences based on a group's beliefs, attitudes, or nationalities; messaging groups about the costs of conducting civilian targeting and the benefits of ceasing the behavior; partnering with organizations opposition groups trust; and pursuing long-term approaches that empower opposition groups to make commitments to civilian protection.

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Preface

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Introduction

This study explored how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are trying to persuade the Syrian opposition to cease from killing and harming civilians. It specifically examined the efforts of two international NGOs, and a brief description of these organizations is presented in the Method chapter.

The Syrian conflict began in March 2011 when Syrian civilians carried out non-violent protests against the Syrian regime's detention of young activists (Sterling, 2012). The regime responded with force, killing protestors, which led to more protests ("Syria profile," 2014). Syrian President Assad then made some political concessions, yet the regime continued to use force against any sign of political dissent. In June 2011, the first significant armed attacks against the regime occurred when armed groups killed 120 state security forces in northern Syria (Pecanha, Saad, & G.V., 2012). Later in July 2011, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) announced its formation, making it the first public face of the armed opposition (Delaney, 2012). Yet, the FSA never had command and control of the many local and foreign fighter groups that eventually surfaced in the conflict and that came under the umbrella of the wider opposition. The conflict continued to grow more violent, and both the state and the opposition have targeted civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2014). In March 2014, at least 2,500,000 Syrians were refugees in the region, and close to 10,000,000 Syrians, who remained in the country, required aid, such as water, food, shelter, and medical treatment (U.S. Department of State, 2014). Furthermore, by May 2014, over 160,000 people had died from the violence and approximately one third were civilians (McClam, 2014). The scale of civilian casualties and harm emphasizes the importance of NGOs' persuasive efforts with the opposition

regarding the need to cease killing and harming civilians.

Several terms are used in presenting the study. First, the term *opposition* refers to both Syrian and foreign fighters, who at any point since the conflict's inception engaged in active combat against the Syrian regime. It therefore includes the Kurdish groups. However, this label is not meant to understate the complexity and decentralized nature of the opposition. The opposition is composed of many groups each with unique political and ideological aims, structures, and leadership styles. The opposition is an example of an *armed non-state actor (ANSA)*. ANSAs include groups outside of a state's control that engage in violence in seeking out their aims (Hofmann & Schneckener, 2011). Other general examples of ANSAs are gangs, militias, or terrorist groups. Alternatively, *states* are recognized countries, such as Syria, that are geographically bound and have defined structures. Lastly, the term *civilian targeting* signifies the killing and harming of civilians, while *civilian protection* refers to preventing civilian casualties and harm.

The study's findings will be valuable to communication professionals from international bodies, states, and other NGOs that are working to influence the opposition. For example, a United Nations (UN) message to both the Syrian opposition and the Syrian government stated that they should "at last live up to their responsibility under humanitarian law and stop targeting civilian areas" (UN News Centre, 2014, para. 7). The findings may offer insight on how the UN can further tailor messages that stress costs for civilian targeting. The results may also inform U.S. messaging efforts for the opposition during military and political exchanges. For example, messages promoting the benefits of civilian protection could reveal how to frame gains the opposition can make for changing their behavior. Also, some foreign NGOs in Syria operate under

fictitious names (Associated Foreign Press, 2013). The results may yield insight on how NGOs can emphasize message content over source characteristics. Lastly, the study may help professionals who aim to influence other regional ANSAs. For example, in Libya, militias often conduct attacks placing civilians at risk (Al Warfalli & Bosalum, 2014). Messages for the opposition could be adapted to engage Libyan militias about civilian protection.

Numerous articles highlighted persuasive techniques that NGOs utilized in influencing ANSAs to follow aspects of international humanitarian norms, which directly relate to civilian protection (Bangerter, 2011; Bellal & Casey-Maslen, 2011; Hofmann, 2012). Hofmann (2012) described how the NGO Geneva Call created the “Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action,” which enables ANSAs to make written declarations against the production and use of landmines and to participate in landmine destruction and follow-up observations ensuring their commitments. She also discussed the International Committee of the Red Cross’s persuasive messages with ANSAs regarding international humanitarian laws including how ANSAs could maintain military advantages, notably well-controlled units; preserve funding and infrastructure; gain credibility with the adversary; influence the adversary to reciprocate behaviors, such as respecting ANSAs’ prisoners under the adversary’s control; enhance their legitimacy with local and global parties; have cultural beliefs that coincide with humanitarian laws; and avoid legal prosecution for non-compliance. Other articles, such as one by Bellal and Casey-Maslen (2011), noted similar persuasive messages but viewed the issue through a legal lens. They addressed why ANSAs must follow international laws and reasons for their non-

compliance, including the belief that compliance would lead to operational losses. The articles provided value in understanding persuasive messages for engaging ANSAs about civilian targeting. Yet, some studies did not entail primary research, and none explored the issue within the Syrian context. This study addressed this gap by presenting an in-depth, evidence based comparison of two NGOs' persuasive efforts with the Syrian opposition.

Literature Review

While the available primary literature did not specifically address NGOs' persuasive efforts with the opposition regarding civilian targeting, broader studies provided valuable insights on ANSAs and Arab audiences. I first reviewed Syrian information sources, including their use of international media, personal networks, and the Internet. Next, I discussed studies that examined how identity impacted intergroup attitudes. I then outlined several persuasive techniques starting with a review of the contradictory results found in shaming efforts in influencing ANSAs and states' violent behavior. After presenting the shaming research, I presented evidence related to source principles, highlighting how respect for authority was low in certain Arab audiences and source likeability increased the likelihood of supporting a domestic policy in a transnational context. Finally, I addressed how external commitments to peace treaties and internal commitments to codes of behavior contributed to ANSAs' reduced levels of violence.

Syrian Information Sources

While the literature did not address the opposition's specific information sources, it examined the role that international media, personal networks, and the Internet served in delivering information to similar Syrian target audiences. Charney and Quirk (2014) produced a report for the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre on Syrian civilians' views of transitional justice that included insights on Syrian information sources. They used a snowball sampling technique to carry out in-depth interviews with 46 Syrian civilians living in Syria, Jordan, and Turkey. The sample included both civilians who approved and disapproved of the state (32 men and 14 women). The findings showed

that participants, who disapproved of the state, followed television news, notably *Al Arabiya*, *Al Jazeera*, *Shada Al Huriah*, *Deir el Zor*, and Arabic formats of *BBC*, *CNN*, *France 24*, and *Sky News*. (*Al Arabiya* is a United Arab Emirate based news outlet, *Al Jazeera* is a Qatar based outlet, and *Shada Al Huriah* and *Deir el Zor* are Syria based outlets.) They also received information from family and friends through phone and Internet communications. The researchers noted when seeking out information online, participants, who disapproved of the state, relied on Facebook, Twitter, local activists' pages, and news outlets' webpages, such as *Al Jazeera's* site. While the sample involved civilians who disapproved of the Syrian state and not specifically opposition members, it offered a similar target audience. Given that these target audiences share similar political views, they may rely on similar information sources. It is possible that these news sources, personal networks, and websites may serve as information pipelines to the opposition.

Another study highlighted the challenges of reaching Syrians, focusing on Syrian refugees' information sources and distrust in certain communication channels (Giovanni, 2013). The research team completed surveys with over 100 Syrian refugees (74% men and 26% women) in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon; Beirut, Lebanon; and Tripoli, Lebanon. The results indicated that a majority of participants (60%) relied on social networks of family and friends for trusted information with television (21%), specifically *Al Arabiya* and *Al Jazeera* as their next trusted source of information. Most respondents (63%) also relied on Short Message Service (SMS) and Whatsapp as a means for exchanging information. Also, participants reported distrust in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) believing that the organization could not protect

their personal data, which could place them and their families at risk. Similar to the aforementioned study, the study's sample of Syrian refugees somewhat differed from the current study's focus on the opposition. Yet, it provided further evidence of how some Syrians relied on informal networks, international media, and the Internet for information, which likely reflects some of the opposition's information sources given the overlap between the target audiences. It also highlighted that some Syrians distrust information disseminated from UN bodies, which could have negative implications for NGOs who rely on UN bodies to convey messages to the opposition about civilian protection.

Lastly, a separate study examined the Arab blog environment describing the networks, dialogues, and information interests of Arab bloggers (Etling, Kelly, Faris, & Palfrey, 2010). The research team employed a mixed methods approach including a social network analysis and computer textual analysis of 6,451 blogs and a human textual analysis of 3,340 of these blogs. The results showed that Syrian bloggers authored content focused on domestic topics, such as politics, and of all the Arab bloggers, they were the most likely to criticize their political leadership. The findings also indicated that Arab bloggers most frequently provided links to YouTube (2070), Wikipedia (932), *Al Jazeera* (817), *BBC* (816), and Flickr (795), and a sample of the most frequently linked YouTube videos addressed political topics. While the study occurred prior to the Syrian conflict, Syrian bloggers' dissent of Syrian leadership made them a similar target audience as the opposition. It is possible that the opposition may follow and even participate in political blogs and YouTube videos that are critical of the Syrian regime. The findings also presented further evidence that Syrians opposed to Syria's political

state followed *Al Jazeera* and *BBC*, which bolsters the argument that the opposition may follow these international news sources.

The articles portrayed that some Syrians with anti-regime views and those in the wider Syrian refugee population relied on several information sources: *Al Arabiya*, *Al Jazeera*, and *BBC*; informal networks of family and friends; and Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and political blogs. The findings also revealed how some Syrians distrusted UN channels. While the results offered value in understanding the broader Syrian information environment, it remains unclear where the opposition turns to for trusted information. The current study examined the communication channels NGOs employ to reach the opposition and their reasons for using these channels.

Attitudes

One of the themes in the literature regarding attitudes and armed conflict was how individuals' social identities impacted their attitudes towards relevant in-groups and out-groups and how this affected conflict. Tajfel (as cited in Cottam, Dietz-Uhler, Mastors, & Preston, 2010) described social identity as a person's view of himself/herself based on his/her association in certain groups and the importance placed on these ties. Groups that an individual is a member of are in-groups, whereas groups that an individual is not a member of are out-groups (Cottam et al., 2010).

One study that investigated civilian protection in the Syrian conflict specifically addressed the opposition's attitudes towards civilians (Civilians in Conflict, 2012). The study involved interviews with opposition members in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The results demonstrated varying attitudes towards civilians within the opposition. FSA members remarked that following an operation in Homs their leadership

held a meeting to evaluate battlefield tactics to assess if civilians had been endangered. This finding suggested that some opposition members were concerned about civilian protection. Alternatively, other findings showed that some opposition members believed that it was acceptable to target Alawite civilians, and Syrian President Assad's Alawite paramilitaries further exacerbated this belief. (Alawite is a sect of Shia Islam, and President Assad's family and supporters are Alawites.) This particular finding revealed that certain opposition members viewed Alawite civilians as an out-group that was aligned with the enemy, making them a legitimate target. The results also indicated that while some opposition members did not intentionally target civilians, they viewed civilian casualties and harm as part of the cost of war. When discussing payments for family members of victims, one fighter stated, "It's a war, people die. I am not supposed to pay" (Civilians in Conflict, 2012, p. 9).

Licata, Klein, Saade, Azzi, and Branscombe (2011) delved deeper in exploring the relationship between self-identity and intergroup attitudes, but they examined it within the Lebanese context and identified how perceptions of blame for Lebanon's civil war and perceived connections between former and current out-group members mediated attitudes. The researchers utilized an Internet survey and had a final sample of 102 respondents (47% were men, 44% were women, and 9% did not specify their sex), who were Lebanese Christian Maronite students. On an eight-point scale with options varying from definitely disagree to definitely agree, participants responded to questions about their level of identification as Maronites (a religious sectarian identity) and Lebanese (a national identity); attitudes towards Muslims; beliefs that Muslims, external parties, or Maronites were to blame for Lebanon's civil war; and perceptions of continuity

(similarity) between currently young Muslims and Muslims who were young during the conflict. They found that participants identified more with being Lebanese ($M = 7.42$) than Maronite ($M = 6.57$). Also, a multiple regression analysis showed that a Lebanese identity increased the likelihood of holding positive attitudes towards Muslims ($b = .52, p < .000$), and a Maronite identity increased the likelihood of holding negative attitudes towards Muslims ($b = -.27, p < .002$). The results meant that individuals with a strong Lebanese (national) identity were more likely to view other Lebanese out-groups, specifically Lebanese Muslims, favorably. However, individuals with a strong Maronite (religious sectarian) identity were more likely to view other religious sectarian out-groups, specifically Lebanese Muslims, unfavorably. Thus, individuals who strongly identify with their religious sectarian group (in-group) may hold negative attitudes towards individuals, who share their nationality but belong to a different religious sectarian group (out-group). Although the study's sample focused on civilians' attitudes and not ANSAs' attitudes, it was relevant to the current study because it examined an Arab in-group's attitudes towards an Arab out-group with the same national identity. It may suggest that opposition members, with stronger national identities than religious sectarian identities, might view Syrian civilians with different religious sectarian identities favorably, making these members less likely to engage in civilian targeting. Alternatively, opposition members with stronger religious sectarian identities (in-group) than national identities may be more likely to hold negative views towards Syrian civilians with different religious sectarian identities (out-group), making these members more susceptible to engage in civilian targeting.

A different study examined how threats influenced hostile inter-group attitudes between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups in Rwanda prior to and during the genocide (McDoom, 2012). The researcher applied the case study method including a content analysis of Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines broadcasts, which had connections to Rwanda's Hutu dominated government; a survey with a cluster sample of 294 Rwandans, including 273 Hutu and 21 Tutsi and 104 individuals who participated in the violence and 190 individuals who did not participate in the violence; and in-depth interviews with Rwandans from two northern and two southern communities. One finding revealed how increased threats increased out-group homogenization, which meant Hutu Rwandans began to see all members of the ethnic out-group (Tutsi) as the same. The content analysis showed that references associating Inyenzi (derogatory term for Tutsi) with all Tutsi significantly grew from prior to the genocide (0.0% of all 96,961 words in pre-genocide sample) to the genocide period (2.0% of all 313,106 words in genocide sample, $p < .01$); references unclearly distinguishing between Inyenzi and Tutsi significantly rose over time (.1% of all 96,961 words in pre-genocide sample and 17.1% of all 313,106 words in genocide sample, $p < .01$). Survey results showed that during the genocide 70.5% of Hutu respondents believed that all and only Tutsi were the enemy, while only 1.9% of Hutu respondents believed that only the Rwandan Patriotic Front rebels (primarily composed of Tutsi) were the enemy. Findings from in-depth interviews complemented these quantitative results where one Hutu respondent in describing perceptions of Tutsi neighbors after the attacks began stated, "If they [our neighbors] were not accomplices they would have told us that the country was going to be attacked. If they did not inform us...they must be the enemy" (McDoom, 2012, p. 149). While the

sample examined a different target population than the current study, it revealed that during conflict Rwandan Hutu (in-group) did not always perceive differences between the enemy rebels (primarily comprised of Tutsi) and the broader Rwandan Tutsi population (out-group), leading many Hutu to negatively view Tutsi. The takeaway for the current study is that opposition members with strong ethnic in-group identities may not perceive differences between Syrian civilians and Syrian regime combatants from the same ethnic out-groups, which may cause some opposition members to negatively view these Syrian civilians. These negative attitudes may contribute to these opposition members engaging in civilian targeting.

These studies highlighted how religious sectarian (non-Alawite and Christian Maronite) and ethnic (Rwandan Hutu) in-group identities contributed to negative attitudes of relevant out-group members in conflict settings. The previously outlined opposition study offered insight on how the opposition's attitudes towards Alawite out-groups negatively impacted civilian protection, yet additional research is needed on this topic. It is important to understand the range of attitudes within the opposition, so that behavior change messages regarding civilian targeting can be tailored appropriately. The current study explored how NGOs understand attitudes within the opposition and how it impacted their persuasive messages regarding the need to cease civilian targeting.

Persuasive Techniques

Shaming. Several studies explored organizations' shaming efforts in influencing state and ANSAs' violent behavior, yet they offered mixed results on the effectiveness of this persuasive technique. Hafner-Burton (2008) examined how shaming efforts impacted states' human rights behaviors in 145 states between 1975 and 2000. The

independent variables were Amnesty International press releases and reports, *Newsweek* and *The Economist* articles, and United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) resolutions. The researcher borrowed from Ron, Ramos, & Rodgers's work (as cited in Hafner-Burton, 2008) to examine Amnesty shaming, which analyzed the total press releases and reports denouncing human rights abuses in a specific state in a given year. *Newsweek* and *The Economist* shaming data came from Ramos, Ron, and Thoms's study (as cited in Hafner-Burton, 2008) that determined the average number of stories on human rights in a state each year, and UNCHR shaming data involved resolutions criticizing a state's human rights practices in a specific year building from Lebovic and Voeten's work (as cited in Hafner-Burton, 2008). The dependent variables were political terror, which included acts such as killings, kidnappings, and incarceration; and political rights abuses, which comprised acts such as manipulating elections and unequal representation within government bodies. Finally, the control variables included two variables about a state's governing structure, gross domestic product (GDP), population, and the presence of civil or interstate war. The method involved several regression analyses. One finding revealed that states' use of terror rose following Amnesty shaming ($b = 0.02, p < .01$), indicating that an NGO's efforts may have had a small impact in increasing human rights violations. Other results were insignificant suggesting that media and UN shaming also did not reduce human rights violations. The author further found that states adopting treaties committed more political rights violations post shaming. These early findings implied that shaming was ineffective in reducing violence, and public commitments did not positively impact political behavior.

Murdie and Davis's (2012) study acknowledged Hafner-Burton's (2008) findings

that shaming may not positively impact states' behavior and argued that other factors must exist. They investigated shaming efforts between 1992 and 2004 in approximately 130 states. (The authors' original sample was 130 states. Yet, their testing only examined states with weaker human rights records, and the final sample was unclear.) The independent variables consisted of international human rights organizations' (HRO) shaming, the existence of HROs in a state, and third party targeting. HRO shaming comprised the annual total of instances where HROs took action against a specific state for a human rights issue, such as Human Rights Watch ordering Macedonia to act in November 2001. Third party targeting was the total instances of human rights criticisms from bodies that were external to the targeted state and non-HROs but referenced HROs in their shaming. One case was in 2002 when the U.K. condemned Iraq and referenced an Amnesty study. One dependent variable was improvements in physical integrity rights over time, and physical integrity rights encompassed murders, torture, incarceration, and kidnappings. The control variables were GDP, regime type, population, and interstate and intrastate conflicts. Applying an ordered probit analysis, the researchers found that HRO shaming, if done with the existence of HROs in a state, positively contributed to improvements in physical integrity rights ($b = .065$, $p < .10$) but this finding was not statistically significant. They further examined the variables finding that higher numbers of HROs in a state increased the likelihood of success of HRO shaming in improving physical integrity rights. Also, HRO shaming, if done with third party targeting, helped increase improvements in physical integrity rights ($b = .004$, $p < .01$), and this finding was significant. Higher levels of third party targeting also positively impacted the effectiveness of HRO shaming in improving physical integrity

rights. While the study did not focus on ANSAs, it provided insights for the current study. Syria's ongoing violence and instability likely make it difficult for Syria based HROs to function effectively on a daily basis. HRO shaming coupled with third party targeting could be effective in influencing the opposition's use of violence against civilians.

Krain (2012) took a different approach from the outlined studies by focusing on shaming effects on genocides and politicides in 25 states between 1976 and 2008. Similar to Hafner-Burton (2008), he chose Amnesty news and reports, *Newsweek* and *The Economist* articles, UNCHR targeting, and the severity of UNCHR punishments as independent variables. However, Krain (2012) examined Amnesty news and reports separately leveraging Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers's data (as cited in Krain, 2012) that described human rights violations in a state in a given year. *Newsweek* and *The Economist* shaming utilized Ramos, Ron, and Thoms's coding and data (as cited in Krain, 2012) to identify the average amount of stories each year on a state's human rights violations. The UNCHR targeting and severity of punishment variables drew from Lebovic and Voeten's work (as cited in Krain, 2012), where targeting entailed the UNCHR investigating a state in a given year and punishment severity ranged from the organization taking no action to moderate sanctions to declaring a formal resolution denouncing the state. His dependent variable was a severity of punishment scale that was an eleven-point ordinal scale of approximate conflict deaths in a state each year, and control variables included a conflict's size and duration, state failures, coups, regime makeup, the economy, population, Cold War effects, and third party interventions. Applying an ordered logit analysis, he found that as UNCHR targeting ($b = -.66, p < .05$),

media articles ($b = -.36, p < .01$), the severity of UNCHR punishment ($b = -.17, p < .05$), and Amnesty reports ($b = -.06, p < .01$) increased, the severity of genocides and politicides significantly decreased. Thus, UNCHR targeting and media had the strongest effect in decreasing political violence, contradicting earlier findings on the limited impact of independent shaming efforts.

Ruggeri and Burgoon (2012) noted the contradictory results in earlier shaming research citing problems with endogeneity and methodologies. (Endogeneity referred to bias that occurred when it appeared that shaming contributed to raising violence levels when in reality further violence drove shaming efforts.) Their study utilized Amnesty press releases, *Newsweek* and *The Economist* articles, and UNCHR resolutions as independent variables. Amnesty, *Newsweek*, and *The Economist* shaming borrowed from Ramos, Ron, and Thoms's work (as cited in Ruggeri & Burgoon, 2012) with Amnesty shaming capturing the total press releases on human rights abuses published on a state in a year and media shaming including the mean amount of human rights stories per state in a year. UNCHR shaming employed Lebovic and Voeten's model (as cited in Ruggeri & Burgoon, 2012) that identified if a state in a specified year was subject to a UN resolution for human rights abuses. The dependent variables were conflict-related deaths, which included fighter and civilian casualties directly resulting from combat, and civilian deaths by state or rebel groups. Control variables included government structure, population, Cold War effects, and conflict duration. Applying a negative binomial regression, they found as media releases increased, conflict deaths significantly decreased ($b = -.16, p < .05$). Yet, as UNCHR and Amnesty press shaming increased, civilian deaths by state forces significantly increased (UNCHR $b = 1.96, p < .01$; Amnesty $b = .15, p < .01$).

However, in using an instrumental variables approach, they found increases in UNCHR resolutions significantly decreased the likelihood of civilian deaths by rebel groups ($b = -1.60, p < .01$) and conflict deaths ($b = -1.23, p < .05$). The authors concluded that existing tests did not account for endogeneity and that studies need more detailed, time-specific data to assess shaming efforts.

The studies demonstrated that the impact of shaming on reducing states and ANSAs' violent behavior remains unclear, although UN shaming resulted in some success. This finding related to the current study, because some NGOs advocate for the UN to take action against the opposition for its civilian targeting. Yet, shaming is only one persuasive technique. The study explored multiple ways NGOs use persuasive communication to influence the opposition's practice of civilian targeting.

Source effects. Some studies noted the differing effects of source authority and likeability in contexts that related to the current study. Ghanem, Kalliny, and Elgoul (2012) investigated Arab Internet communication assessing a range of cultural tendencies, which included findings on power distance. Power distance referred to measures of deference to authority, disapproval of authority, and a general power distance score with higher scores indicating a tendency to defer to individuals holding authority. The researchers performed a content analysis of 1,081 online responses to six *Al Arabiya* articles in March 2009. The findings related to power distance revealed that 8.8% of posts demonstrated little deference to authority, 2.3% high deference, and 88.9% were not applicable; 9.2% of posts voiced disapproval of local leadership, 3.2% voiced approval, and 87.6% were not applicable; and 9.3% of posts reflected low power distance, 2.5% reflected high power distance, and 88.2% were not applicable. The

statistics were small but indicated that responses were more likely to portray anti-authority than deferential views. Given that the current study also focuses on an Arab audience, the results implied that the opposition may disregard authority figures and therefore discount messages from these sources.

A different study explored how transnational sources impacted individuals' beliefs towards international and domestic policy issues (Dragojlovic, 2013). The method involved a quasi-experimental design where 177 Canadian university students completed Internet surveys. Respondents in the control group received cues from unspecified advocates about raising funding for foreign aid (international issue) or welfare (domestic issue), while the experimental group received cues from Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron about raising funds for these issues. The independent variables consisted of source positivity and issue awareness. Source positivity reflected respondents' approval or disapproval of Cameron, confidence in Cameron's decisions in Afghanistan, and approval or disapproval of the United Kingdom; issue awareness was a combination of respondents' proclivity to keep up on the news and the frequency they saw Cameron in the press. The dependent variable was respondents' support for additional funding for foreign aid or welfare. Support entailed agreeing that Canada's funding for these issues should increase, decrease, or remain the status quo. The researcher found that the Cameron cue, if occurring with positive impressions of Cameron and either the welfare or foreign policy issue, increased the likelihood that respondents favored additional funding for these policies ($b = 5.09, p < .05$). The results also indicated that when source positivity reached its peak, support for increasing funding for welfare increased by 50%; yet, negative views of Cameron decreased support for

increasing funding for welfare by 50%. These findings revealed that positive attitudes towards an international source contributed to respondents adopting the source's domestic policy position. Given that the opposition most likely views civilian targeting as a domestic issue, the results implied that the opposition may adopt policies on civilian targeting that are advocated by transnational sources they view positively.

The studies related to source effects highlighted that some Arab audiences demonstrated a disregard for authority, while a positively regarded transnational source among Canadian participants contributed to increased support for a domestic policy. It is unclear how the opposition views sources of authority and if source likeability can positively influence their behavior towards civilians. The current study examined how NGOs are employing source principles, such as authority and likeability, in their persuasive messaging.

Armed groups and commitments. The literature on ANSAs and commitments was broad and showed that both external and internal commitments positively impacted ANSAs' violent behavior. External commitments were obligations ANSAs made regarding a specific behavior to other parties, where internal commitments represented the dedication of group members to their group's beliefs and behaviors or norms and leaders' enforcement of these norms. One study addressing external commitments explored how biased and unbiased mediators contributed to ANSAs and states' commitments to peace in conflicts from 1989 to 2003 in 206 conflict situations (Svensson, 2007). The researcher utilized biased state mediators, biased ANSA mediators, and non-biased mediators as the independent variables. Biased mediators were parties that delivered visible assistance, such as arms, to the state or ANSA; non-

biased mediators did not offer assistance to either side but had interests in the outcomes. The dependent variable was peace treaties, which were measured by identifying the year following treaties between state and ANSAs, where conflict deaths were below 25. The control variables were the length of the conflict, conflict issue, level of violence, number of ANSAs, size of the state's forces, GDP, state's governmental structure, and time since previous treaties. The researcher carried out a probit estimate and found that non-biased mediators ($b = .71, p < .01$) and biased state mediators ($b = .60, p < .01$) significantly contributed to groups committing to peace, while biased ANSAs mediators ($b = .07, n.s.$) had no significant impact on peace commitments. Also, when the researcher kept the other independent variables at their means, biased state mediators ($b = 1.21, p < .01$) and non-biased mediators ($b = .78, p < .01$) still significantly improved ANSAs' peace commitments, yet in this case state mediators had a stronger effect on commitments.

Nilsson (2008) also investigated ANSAs' commitments to peace treaties but researched how excluding other ANSAs in treaties impacted ANSAs' commitments. The researcher used the Uppsala Conflict Data Program to examine 40 intrastate conflicts between 1989 and 2004; each conflict included a minimum of one peace treaty. One aspect of the study contained the following independent variables: excluded ANSAs, included ANSAs with agreements that excluded other ANSAs, and included ANSAs where excluded ANSAs waged violence on the state. (The term excluded signified ANSAs that did not participate in a peace treaty, while the term included referred to ANSAs that participated in a peace treaty.) The dependent variable was the dyadic peace duration, which represented if violence occurred between the specific included or excluded ANSA and the state since the peace treaty. The control variables were total

actors per conflict, length of time since the first year 25 deaths occurred in the conflict between included or excluded ANSAs and the state, strength of the conflict, nature of the conflict dispute, existence of UN troops, existence of other peacekeeping troops, and treaties containing power distribution. The researcher conducted a Cox proportional hazards regression and found that excluded ANSAs were more likely to wage conflict with the state ($RR = 2.00, p < .01$). Also, there was no relationship between included ANSAs with agreements that excluded other ANSAs and conflict with the state ($RR = 1.14, p = n.s.$); included ANSAs where excluded groups waged violence were also unlikely to wage violence on the state ($RR = 1.05, p = n.s.$). The results suggested that ANSAs that committed to external treaties were unlikely to participate in violence, regardless of other ANSAs' violent behavior. It implied that gaining commitments from opposition groups regarding pledges to end their civilian targeting could contribute to reducing their civilian targeting regardless of other groups' civilian targeting practices.

Other literature investigated how groups' internal commitments influenced their violent behavior, specifically civilian targeting. Haer (2012) explored the relationships between group characteristics of ANSAs, including members' commitment levels, and civilian harm in 71 ANSAs from 1989-2010. The independent variables encompassed greed, which included monetary motivations of recruits and members; grievance, which consisted of economic, ethnic, political, or religious disgruntlement; social cohesiveness of the group; and the degree of hierarchy and commitment within the group. The commitment variable comprised the voluntary or forced nature of members' recruitment; members' ability to quit; members' ability to retain external contacts; and factors related to loyalty, pride, and fate. The dependent variable, drawn from the Uppsala Conflict

Data Program, was civilian deaths caused by ANSAs between 1989 and 2010; the control variables included a group's size, group's age, amount of other ANSAs present, conflict casualties, and population. The method entailed a Bayesian ordered probit, and the results indicated there was no significant relationship between the level of commitment among ANSAs members and civilian deaths ($b = -.04$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). Yet, when accounting for the control variables, increased commitments among group members decreased the likelihood of civilian deaths ($b = -.15$, the author did not provide the p value). This finding suggested that under certain conditions ANSAs with dedicated members were less likely to engage in civilian targeting.

Manekin (2013) found similar results in his study, which investigated how group characteristics of Israeli combat units contributed to unauthorized civilian targeting. Independent variables consisted of length of deployment around civilians; revenge, which was a measure of fighter and civilian deaths; morale; and command discipline, which included leadership authority, obedience to rules, and punishments for targeting civilians. Leadership authority involved leaders' ability to enforce the rules with higher ranking soldiers, obedience to rules entailed the degree that internal codes of conduct were implemented, while punishment represented four outcomes for targeting civilians ranging from no punishment to imprisonment. The dependent variable was an additive score of civilian targeting that comprised physical and verbal harm, damage of civilian objects, and capturing civilian property. Lastly, the control variables were participants' rank and service in Special Forces units. The researcher carried out Internet surveys, and the final sample comprised 118 former Israeli soldiers, who served between 1999 and 2006 in various units. The findings demonstrated that leadership authority ($b = -.30$, $p < .001$),

obedience to rules ($b = -.27, p < .05$), and punishments for targeting civilians ($b = -.57, p < .001$) had negative relationships with civilian targeting. These results indicated that as these command discipline characteristics increased civilian targeting decreased. Also, a standard ordinary least squares regression showed that leadership authority significantly contributed to decreased civilian targeting when excluding the variable punishment for targeting civilians ($b = -.14, p < .01$) and when including the same variable ($b = -.13, p < .05$). Obedience to rules significantly contributed to decreased civilian targeting when excluding the variable punishment for targeting civilians ($b = -.27, p < .01$). The findings signified that strong leaders, in a variety of conditions, and units that implemented rules, under certain conditions, were less likely to carry out unauthorized civilian targeting. Although the sample was a state and not an ANSA, the study offered takeaways for the current study. Opposition units with effective leaders and disciplined members may be less likely to engage in civilian targeting.

The outlined studies demonstrated how ANSAs' external commitments to peace treaties reduced the likelihood that they reengaged in violence despite other ANSAs' violent behaviors, and ANSAs were more likely to commit to peace treaties when non-biased or state-biased mediators were involved in the process. Also, internal commitments of state and ANSAs' members to comply with group norms contributed to decreasing civilian targeting. The current study expanded upon this research by examining how NGOs are obtaining commitments from the opposition regarding ceasing civilian targeting.

The findings from these studies revealed valuable insights for the current study. First, Syrian information sources included *Al Arabiya*, *Al Jazeera*, *BBC*, family, friends,

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and political blogs. Second, strong religious, sectarian, or ethnic in-group identities negatively influenced attitudes towards relevant out-groups. Next, while there were some contradictory findings regarding shaming efforts of ANSAs, several studies found UN shaming to be effective. Also, likeability of international sources increased the probability of support for a domestic policy, while respect for authority was low in a study of Arab audiences. The commitment research showed that ANSAs were more likely to commit to treaties when negotiations included non-biased or state-biased mediators; ANSAs, who participated in peace treaties, were unlikely to reengage in conflict. Finally, internal commitments to group norms increased the likelihood of civilian protection. This study expanded upon the research exploring how NGOs are using persuasion to change attitudes and behaviors within the opposition towards civilian targeting by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: How are NGOs disseminating messages to the Syrian opposition and international actors regarding the need for the opposition to cease killing and harming civilians?

RQ2: What types of attitudes are NGOs trying to change within the Syrian opposition related to ceasing the killing and harming civilians?

RQ3: What kinds of persuasive techniques are NGOs using and suggesting that international actors employ in encouraging the Syrian opposition to cease killing and harming civilians?

Method

I utilized the case study method for the study. The case study is a qualitative method, which offers an in-depth examination of an individual, group, organization, occurrence, or process (Stacks, 2011). One strength of the case study is that it enables researchers to explore the context of the issue under examination, which offers an opportunity to identify lessons learned from decisions and events (Stacks, 2011; Yin, 2009). The case study, like other qualitative methods, also provides depth on a topic. Yet, it can offer the most comprehensive understanding of an issue, because its findings draw upon data from multiple methods (Stacks, 2011). Alternatively, one weakness of the case study is that the results cannot be generalized to the population. Case studies also cannot determine causality; however, they can build on findings from experiments and identify why an effect occurred (Yin, 2009).

The case study was an appropriate method for this study, because the topic entailed an in-depth investigation of two NGOs' processes for persuading the opposition to cease killing and harming civilians. One of the NGOs is based in Switzerland (referred to as the Swiss NGO) and is very active in engaging ANSAs, including the opposition, throughout the Middle East. The other NGO is a U.S. based entity (referred to as the U.S. NGO) with a regional presence in the Middle East, and its work includes messaging the opposition and conveying recommendations to international bodies and states about ways to stop the opposition's practice of civilian targeting. The approach entailed data collection via the following two qualitative methods: (a) in-depth interviews with NGO staff and a training partner and (b) a qualitative content analysis of materials used to convey messages to the opposition and other relevant actors about civilian targeting as

well as materials from the opposition in response to NGOs' messaging efforts. It produced a rich understanding of the topic and the opportunity to identify best practices for engaging similar ANSAs about civilian targeting.

Data Sources

Artifact selection. The two NGOs under investigation had different persuasive approaches with the opposition; therefore, the qualitative content analysis examined different materials from each organization. The Swiss NGO utilized various approaches for engaging the opposition about the need to cease killing and harming civilians. It directly reached out to opposition groups through meetings and in-person training sessions. Additionally, it reached out to the wider opposition by creating and disseminating videos and booklets about ceasing civilian targeting. For the Swiss NGO portion of the study, I collected a census of campaign videos, which in part targeted the opposition; an English version of the training booklet, which was similar to the Arabic training booklet that was disseminated to the opposition; English training modules, which were similar to Arabic training modules used with the opposition; a 2012 conference report on the broader topic; a 2014-2016 Swiss NGO strategy document; and a census of opposition authored code of conduct documents. I collected and analyzed the English versions of training documents due to language capabilities.

The U.S. NGO directly engaged the opposition about the need to cease killing and harming civilians via methods such as press releases, reports, letters, and Twitter feeds. However, the organization also messaged other international actors, such as states, on ways they could encourage the opposition to cease civilian targeting. I collected and analyzed messages directly intended for the opposition and for other actors, who the U.S.

NGO viewed as having influence with the opposition. For the U.S. NGO portion of the study, I collected a simple random sample of press releases on the topic, a census of reports on the topic, and a census of letters between the NGO and the opposition and from the NGO to international bodies regarding the opposition's practice of civilian targeting.

Although the materials differed, I applied the same inclusion and exclusion criteria. The conflict began in March 2011, but I only included materials from January 1, 2012 – June 30, 2014. I excluded materials from 2011, because the opposition was in its early stages of development, and the state was the primary perpetrator of civilian targeting. Also, I included any materials that addressed (a) preventing civilian targeting, (b) preventing the targeting of civilian property, (c) prohibiting unlawful weapons, (d) treating the wounded and dead, (e) respecting prisoners' rights, (f) preventing civilian displacement, and (g) protecting humanitarian and medical relief. I included these specific issues as part of civilian targeting, because one of the Swiss NGO's training documents presented these issues in ways that related to civilian harm. Additionally, I included material on civilian targeting intended for the opposition or for all armed actors in Syria. This approach allowed me to assess the NGOs' messaging directed at the opposition and to compare differences between tailored and broad messaging. Lastly, I analyzed the text in all the materials but only analyzed the graphics in the campaign videos, training booklets, and training modules.

Alternatively, I excluded materials about respecting civilian property, respecting women, and protecting children. In other contexts, the Swiss NGO addressed the protection of women and children as independent behavior changes. Also, my study's

focus was about reaching the opposition about the protection of civilians in general, whereas women and children represent unique populations. For these reasons, I excluded materials about these specific populations. Lastly, the Swiss NGO differentiated between targeting and respecting civilian property. Targeting involved attacking civilian property, whereas respecting entailed not taking civilian property. I included the former because the result could kill or harm civilians. However, I excluded materials about respecting civilian property, because it did not present immediate harm to civilians.

I retrieved all the materials from each organization's website except the Swiss NGO's campaign videos, which came from YouTube and a Facebook page for the campaign. Thus, all materials are publicly available. All but two of the Swiss NGO materials were stand-alone documents. The exceptions were the campaign videos and the opposition authored documents. There were a total of seven videos, but I only analyzed the videos that met the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria producing a census of six videos. Additionally, there were five opposition authored documents; after reviewing them to see if they met the criteria, I had a final census of two documents. For collecting a simple random sample of press releases from the U.S. NGO, I took the following steps. I first pulled up the list of press releases on Syria from 2012; 2013; and January 1, 2014 through June 30, 2014. I then read each press release summary to determine if it met the inclusion criteria. If I was unsure if it met the criteria, I read the full text. I noted any press releases that fell within the criteria, and this list included 38 press releases and composed my sampling frame. I then entered the press release titles into an Excel spreadsheet and used Excel to generate an automatic simple random sample of 15 press releases. I applied a similar approach in obtaining my census of reports and

letters from the U.S. NGO. I retrieved reports and letters regarding Syria in the determined timeframe. My initial search of reports produced 11 results. After reading the summary of each report to determine if it met the inclusion criteria, I had a census of three reports. My initial search of letters produced 12 results; after reviewing the summaries and applying my inclusion criteria, my census included seven letters. Lastly, I included a census of three letters from the opposition to the U.S. NGO regarding civilian targeting.

Participant recruitment. For both NGOs, I applied a snowball sampling technique to recruit participants for the in-depth interviews. The interview participants from the Swiss NGO included program and communication staff who have worked the Syria account, and a trainer partner, who has engaged the opposition about civilian targeting. The interview participant from the U.S. NGO was a senior researcher from its Middle East based office, who works the Syria account. I had a total of four interview participants.

I recruited my participants by sending them an email invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix A). The invitation explained the study's focus, that participants' names would not be connected to their answers, and the basic format of the interview.

Data Procedures

The study investigated three primary constructs: NGOs' dissemination methods for reaching the opposition about civilian targeting, attitudes within the opposition towards civilians, and persuasive techniques for encouraging the opposition to cease civilian targeting. I addressed the first research question by asking about preferred channels for conveying messages. I addressed the second research question regarding

attitudes within the opposition by asking about positive and negative views the opposition has of civilians, including civilians who support the regime and civilians with differing sectarian, ethnic, and national identities. I defined sectarian identity as an individual's self-perception based on his/her actual or perceived membership in a religious sect. Next, I defined ethnic identity as an individual's self-perception based on his/her actual or perceived membership in an ethnic group. Finally, I defined national identity as an individual's self-perception based on his/her actual or perceived membership in a state. I answered the third research question regarding persuasive techniques by asking about compliance messages, message difficulty, source characteristics, and commitment strategies. I defined compliance messages as communications that stressed ways that groups would punish the opposition for committing civilian targeting or reward the opposition for preventing civilian targeting (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003).

Artifact collection. I began my data collection by saving an electronic version of each of my artifacts. I coded each artifact and assigned all artifacts from a particular sample or census the same letter with each artifact having a unique letter number code. For example, I coded the videos with the letter A, and I labeled the first video A1, the second video A2, and so on. I then coded the training booklet as B1 and continued this process until all the artifacts had codes. I created an electronic Analysis Sheet (see Appendix B) for each artifact and labeled it with the artifact's corresponding code. I then read the research questions and Analysis Sheet questions, so I could review what information I needed to consider in examining the artifacts. I then reviewed each artifact and electronically completed its Analysis Sheet. A few weeks later, I reviewed the artifacts a second time to ensure that I did not miss any data. I also inputted additional

relevant observations of the artifacts that were not addressed by the Analysis Sheet questions.

Interview procedures. Once I received Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB) approval, I contacted the interview participants by email to arrange a day and time to conduct the interviews. The email also contained a copy of the consent form, and I asked participants to read it before the interview and to call or email me if they had any concerns or questions. I conducted all the interviews on the Internet through Skype and recorded them using the software application QuickTime Player. I began each interview by asking participants for their oral consent regarding their participation and for their permission to electronically record the discussion. I then proceeded by following the Interview Guide, which addressed questions on methods for disseminating messages, attitudes within the opposition towards civilians, and a NGO's persuasive messaging techniques for encouraging the opposition to cease civilian targeting (see Appendix C). Each interview lasted about one hour. I also followed up with participants if I needed clarification on their responses. Participants did not receive any incentives. Finally, the interviews were transcribed.

Data Analysis

I began my data analysis by creating a master Analysis Sheet for each NGO's results, where I copied and pasted all of the input from the individual NGO Analysis Sheets. This step organized all of the qualitative content analysis data into two documents and enabled me to identify themes and gaps in the data. Themes are trends that appeared within different data sets that provided insight in answering a research

question. I looked for how themes offered both direct and indirect explanations for the research questions.

In analyzing the interview material, I first read the interview transcripts several times. I then coded the data by highlighting all the data corresponding with RQ1 in orange, the data corresponding with RQ2 in pink, and the data corresponding with RQ3 in yellow. In the margin, I noted what the data addressed, specifically channels, attitudes, compliance messaging, source characteristics, commitment techniques, and/or any other relevant material. For example, if a response addressed commitment mechanisms a NGO used to influence the opposition, I highlighted the section in yellow and in the margin wrote “commitment techniques.” After I coded all the transcripts, I examined the data for each research question to identify themes that directly or indirectly offered support for each question.

Finally, I drafted a document outlining the research questions and their supporting themes with examples from the artifacts and interviews. In the results section, I attempted to present themes based on various data sources, a technique known as triangulation (Yin, 2009). This process provided context and improved the validity of the findings. I also presented results that drew from only a single type of data source if key themes were unavailable in multiple sources and pointed to contradictions in the data. I supported each theme with descriptions and quotes from the artifacts and transcripts. Note that if English was not the first language of an interview participant, quotes may reflect grammatical errors that were not corrected in order to preserve the meaning of the discussion.

Results

Swiss NGO

The Swiss NGO is headquartered in Switzerland but carries out its mission globally, including the Middle East. The organization focuses on engaging armed non-state actors (ANSAs) in efforts to shape their behavior towards civilians. The Swiss NGO has been very involved in directly and indirectly engaging facets of the Syrian opposition about ceasing civilian targeting. Their staff members and training partners have conducted media campaigns, meetings, and trainings in attempts to positively influence the opposition's behavior towards civilians. The results drew from their input and the analysis of campaign videos, training booklets, training modules, a conference report on the broader issue, a strategy document, and opposition authored conduct documents.

RQ1: How Are NGOs Disseminating Messages to the Syrian Opposition and International Actors Regarding the Need for the Opposition to Cease Killing and Harming Civilians?

In-person exchanges. One of the main channels the Swiss NGO utilized in reaching the opposition about the need to cease civilian targeting was through in-person exchanges, notably meetings and training sessions. During training sessions, trainers leveraged numerous other means to convey messages including presentation materials, videos, and games. A Swiss NGO staff member commented, “The direct engagement which is meetings and discussing the policies of the ANSAs and then trainings. This is our main means of putting out or disseminating the message.” Another Swiss NGO staff member elaborated on how training sessions enabled the organization to delve deeper on

message content noting, “Then during the trainings that we organize for them, of course we use the PowerPoint presentation where we’d maybe detail a bit more on the different rules [regarding civilian targeting].” He later further elaborated on how certain means, such as the videos, present messages such as “Do not attack medical facilities” in a simple format, but the reality on the ground can be more complicated because the enemy may position fighters in a hospital. He noted that trainings allow trainers to further explain concepts and rules and enable opposition members the opportunity to ask questions. Perhaps, the most illuminating response came from the Swiss NGO’s trainer’s description of how games are an effective means for delivering messages. He provided the following example:

We ask people to play the role of an officer at an airport and somebody as an attorney or with masters or with PhD abroad and then all of a sudden this person is recognized by this officer as a wanted person or whatever. When this person is stopped at the airport he’s questioned: “Where are you going?” “Why are you doing this?” “You know you’ve been part of some accusations and your name has been mentioned, your photograph is listed in here” and he’s taken to custody. He said, “No, it’s not me. It’s my commander.” This commander’s name is mentioned. The commander is not there but they say, “You are responsible for this. It’s individual responsibility.” This is [what people don’t] understand what’s the meaning of individual responsibility but we mention it...because this is part of the implementation of the law. And this person is not capable of reaching his destination. His future is done because he’s arrested for allegedly committing war crimes. This is a role play. Usually, this is done with a selection of two or

three of the people who are showing signs of accepting and understanding more than others.

The trainer later described how sometimes opposition members are initially reserved in the beginning of training sessions, and so he relies on games to help engage and motivate them. He explained the positive effect games elicit noting, “I have never seen anyone who refrained or said no including old religious leaders like 65 years old who played and ran and took active participation as they played and they closed their eyes, everything.” Thus, role playing and other games were effective channels for not only disseminating messages regarding civilian targeting but for enabling opposition members to participate in conveying and learning about the rules of conflict.

Videos. Another channel the Swiss NGO leveraged to disseminate messages was their video campaign that utilized media and social media and offered a means for reaching across the opposition and to wider Syrian audiences. A Swiss NGO staff member commented on the video campaign saying, “Media in general especially in our campaign [Swiss NGO’s Syria campaign], it was a media campaign mainly. Now, we are working to enhance it and to develop it more and more.” A different Swiss NGO staff member elaborated on the video campaign and its effectiveness:

The problem with Syria is that the opposition groups are not very well-structured. They have a lot of different units with a very weak command chain and so it’s very difficult to engage....the idea was to have a different approach because of that and to try more mass media targeting not only the armed groups but also different kinds of militants and activists and people that’s having contact with the groups... .

The most telling sign that the videos reached the opposition was that opposition groups further distributed the videos through their own channels. A Swiss NGO staff member explained, “On, their website, they also posted the videos on their Facebook and Twitter accounts which are followed by...people....[T]hey were also broadcasted on many local opposition TV and also in *Al Arabiya*, which is one of the main Arabic TV... .”

Booklets. The Swiss NGO also relied on booklets for disseminating messages regarding the need to cease civilian targeting. The organization discussed how booklets are an effective way for reaching fighters on the ground. A Swiss NGO staff member remarked, “For the fighters, the best mean is the booklet....[I]t’s really direct engagement to the fighter himself because it’s very easy. He can just look at the drawings and understand what the message is.” The Swiss NGO trainer offered a similar comment stating, “We give them some materials also like a...brochure....Some of the drawings we give them... .” Another Swiss NGO staff member stated, “So many of the booklets. They were sent to Syria and also distributed to the opposition groups.”

Mobile apps. Lastly, a Swiss NGO staff member described how the organization is developing new channels, including mobile apps and card games, to deliver messages explaining:

We are also planning to launch a mobile app, which is almost ready....[T]he app basically has different scenarios....[E]ach scenario is composed of three different questions....The idea is to have it as a game, not as a boring quiz....In the game, the user is put in a situation. Let’s say they are at the checkpoint and a truck is coming. So, the first question is, “Can you stop the truck?” Then, “Yes,”

“no.”...Then, “Can you inspect the truck and can you confiscate the material in the truck?”....You have to insert “yes” or “no” every time. We try through these different situations to show again to explain the international humanitarian law and maybe more details than in the booklet and in the videos because we have more time and space. [International humanitarian law (IHL) is often referenced by interview participants and relates to laws that protect civilians during armed conflict.]

The example demonstrated how the Swiss NGO continues to creatively expand its channels for disseminating messages to the opposition about ceasing civilian targeting.

Low message complexity. In utilizing the aforementioned channels for messaging the opposition, the Swiss NGO primarily created and disseminated simple messages around civilian targeting. These channels and their simple messages made for low complexity in the overall message presentation and enabled the Swiss NGO to reach multiple facets and tiers of the opposition as well as the wider Syrian community. The simplicity came across in straightforward, brief audio and visual messages depicting how fighters should treat civilians. Training booklets demonstrated this simple design where each page contained a few phrases outlining the messages and one or two images illustrating the concept (“Fifteen key rules,” 2014). For example, one page stated, “Respect medical personnel, hospitals and ambulances. Do not misuse protective symbols such as the Red Cross or Red Crescent.” One image showed a fighter allowing medical personnel to move through a street with a green check in the upper left corner. The other image depicted fighters painting the symbol of the Red Cross on their armed truck with a red *X* in the upper left corner. The images and text conveyed in a basic

format that the first behavior was acceptable and the second behavior was unacceptable. Separately, a Swiss NGO staff member, in discussing the campaign videos, highlighted, “The idea was really to create messages that are very straightforward, very simple, and very efficient. Basically, we decided to have only one message per video, one very simple message per video that everybody could understand.” He later attributed some of the success of the campaign videos to their short duration noting, “Also, probably the length....It’s not a 10 minute video. We explained a bit for almost 30 seconds.” A different Swiss NGO staff member also commented on the organization’s simplistic approach mentioning, “We tried to prioritize all these articles and texts of these laws, international humanitarian law and human rights, in 15 main rules which are the minimum standards of any combatant that have to comply with.”

Another attribute of many of the Swiss NGO’s messages that contributed to their low message complexity was their captivating appeal. The campaign videos especially had a captivating quality, which enhanced the messaging and broadened their reach. For example, one video regarding the need to respect prisoners’ rights depicted the illustrator drawing a prisoner sitting in his cell (Syria IHL, 2013). A pair of shackles appeared over the prisoner’s feet accompanied by a sound effect of chains, and then the illustrator quickly moved the shackles off the page. The introduction of the word *fighter* had a dramatic effect where the word appeared to fall on the screen superimposed over the drawing of the prisoner. Simultaneously, a loud stamping sound accompanied the introduction of the word further emphasizing the appeal of being labeled a fighter. This combination of visual and audio effects bolstered the video’s appeal. A Swiss NGO staff member commented on the video’s appeal noting:

It was a raising awareness campaign and it was very welcomed from everybody....[W]e're using it as one of our entering strategies for some ANSAs because it doesn't contradict with any of their principles or beliefs....[I]t's very attractive. It depends on drawings. It depends on motion.

A different Swiss NGO staff member also addressed the appeal of the videos' design commenting:

We just wanted to have a very for a TV spot something very acting and very forward. That's something that even children could see and understand. I mean the cartoon drawings, I think they're very attracting....I mean the cartoons which are more designed for children and the rules which are talking about the war crimes, humanitarian law and so makes a very interesting combination.

RQ2: What Types of Attitudes Are NGOs Trying to Change within the Syrian Opposition Related to Ceasing the Killing and Harming Civilians?

Negative attitudes towards Alawites. The Swiss NGO reported that the opposition does not directly express negative views towards the general civilian population, but the opposition's statements and behaviors demonstrate harmful attitudes towards civilian sub-groups with perceived connections to the regime. It explained these perceived regime connections lead the opposition to view civilian sub-groups as responsible for regime abuses where the opposition then does not draw a distinction between civilians and regime fighters. The Swiss NGO explained that this drives the hostile attitudes towards these civilian sub-groups, which is reflected by the opposition's practices of killing, harming, or using these civilians as bargaining chips against the

regime. One of the primary sub-groups identified was the Alawite community, who often are targeted by the opposition. A Swiss NGO staff member explained:

We didn't work with people who are adopting such policy or such attitude but in practice...when we have the discussions with them, many times we go through some expressions that they use in discriminating the villages, for example when we attacked this Alawite village....Even in the expressions, you can feel that...even if it's not adopted, this is not a policy but at some point, we are somehow sure that many of their fighters...have this attitude and have this motivation even for going through this war.

A trainer from the Swiss NGO confirmed that the opposition negatively views Alawites and believed that some opposition groups deliberately seek to harm this group of civilians. The trainer remarked:

I did not see a direct intentional...of these groups to attack the civilian population...unless it came to certain category of Syrian population, the Alawites who are close to...President Assad...where these people [opposition members] have indicated that because these people [the Alawites] have tortured us....We will cause them harm...we will intentionally harm them, we will keep their women as captive and whatever... .

He further elaborated on how opposition groups draw a connection between the regime and Syrian Alawites and how this leads to hostile views towards this religious sectarian community noting:

They are intentionally purposefully wanting to cause harm to this sub-group....They know that these are civilians but this is one of the mercy systems of

harming the regime by attacking these Alawites....[B]y arresting or by taking hostages of the Alawites, the soldiers are trying to use some kind of hostage situation...try to initiate an exchange where they call the mediators or even the government in Syrian regime if they wish to have these people back... .

Negative attitudes towards regime supporters. The Swiss NGO also identified that the opposition holds hostile views towards actual or perceived regime supporters who are so closely associated with the regime that their civilian status is overlooked. A Swiss NGO staff member explained the challenge in getting opposition members to acknowledge that there are civilians on all sides of the conflict stating:

The main difficulty is not to convince but to make those people understand...at some point that civilians are not only your civilians. Civilians are from the other side too. At some point, they can't recognize this issue...not all of them because...they're trying to defend themselves... .

He later described how often the opposition does not distinguish between pro-regime civilians and regime fighters noting:

This is the main difficulty to make them understand that there is a huge difference between participation and hostilities and supporting through political situation or political point of view. This is very problematic and very difficult....So they have this privilege to use or invest in the reality that there's an enemy [the regime] and we can minimize the power of this enemy by targeting the activists who are for example supporting financially media or whatever, but finally at the end, they are civilians.

RQ3: What Kinds of Persuasive Techniques Are NGOs Using and Suggesting that International Actors Employ in Encouraging the Syrian Opposition to Cease Killing and Harming Civilians?

Relevancy of international rules. The Swiss NGO conveyed that it tailors its messaging to opposition groups based on the values they place on issues such as international legitimacy and Islamic rules. In reaching more moderate Islamic or secular opposition groups, the Swiss NGO primarily framed its messaging to emphasize international legitimacy and accountability, which are issues these groups deem important. The Swiss NGO staff member commented:

We're dealing very closely with the Kurds in Syria....We don't even mention anything about the congruence of Islamic rules and the IHL. The main focus there is about women for example because they are really interested in this fighting discrimination and giving the women their rights....For other groups, they are just caring about IHL, about accountability, about criminal justice and what will happen...they have a lot of questions for us about their behavior and their practices during war....How is it interpreted in IHL? Are we violators or not? They are really concerned about the image in the international community and they try to comply with IHL.

Even though the aforementioned example highlighted the protection of women, which is a civilian sub-group outside the scope of this study, it demonstrated how the Swiss NGO tailors messaging to specific opposition audiences. The Swiss trainer also provided a similar example stating, "A group that is not so religious...not fundamental but still religious I don't articulate a lot on the religious factors but I [talk] the law."

Compliance with international rules. In presenting messages about international legitimacy and accountability, the Swiss NGO mainly conveyed that the opposition needs to cease civilian targeting because it has a responsibility to comply with the rules of conflict, specifically IHL. One Swiss NGO staff member explained, “The core content of our messaging is the international humanitarian law. In such complex situations like in Syria...it’s better to use the international humanitarian norms which is a combination between human rights and IHL, the international humanitarian law.” Another Swiss NGO staff member confirmed this compliance themed approach stating, “All the messages came from the international humanitarian law and are familiar with all these treaties and conventions... .” Additionally, a campaign video portrayed the need for combatants not to target civilian objects (Syria IHL, 2013). (Civilian objects are civilian infrastructure or non-military infrastructure such as hospitals, mosques, or markets.) The narrator in the video stated, “In times of war, not everything is allowed. Do not target or attack civilian objects or public properties. War has rules too.” Simultaneously, an illustrator drew a residential scene including homes and a mosque, while a target emblem kept appearing over the residential buildings. Each time the target appeared, the illustrator’s hand moved the target off the page, signifying that targeting civilian buildings is not allowed. Thus, the audio and visual messaging directly and indirectly conveyed that targeting civilian objects violates rules.

Costs for noncompliance with international rules. The costs for non-compliance with IHL included various consequences the opposition will endure, and one of the main costs was legal repercussions. The Swiss NGO trainer explained how he conveys this cost stating, “If you kill civilians, if you attack civilians, this is...war crimes.

Let's say that you traveled somewhere and then you are recognized. You will be taken to court....[Y]ou will be held accountable... ." Separately, a training booklet outlined that individuals who breach the rules will be "investigated and sanctioned" under international protocols ("Fifteen key rules," 2014). The language "sanctioned" implied some type of legal consequences for engaging in civilian targeting. Also, the training modules presented that one of the rationales for why fighters should follow the rules was criminal liability ("Introduction to the," 2012). The message implied that fighters, who violate the rules, will endure criminal charges for non-compliance.

Another cost the Swiss NGO relayed to the opposition was that civilian targeting will decrease its legitimacy domestically. A Swiss NGO staff member commented, "They will lose their popular support. The ground that they're based on, they are working or operating in populated areas where they are seeking for people supporting them and people who protect them....They will lose this." The Swiss NGO trainer also shared a similar response about what he tells the opposition stating:

If the situation finishes and you face the situation where there will be elections to choose the government of a new Syria. Do you think people will love you or like you when you kill civilians or you're trying to become a leader? Of course, this is not acceptable.

A campaign video also indirectly suggested the loss of legitimacy the opposition will incur for civilian targeting (Swiss NGO's Syria campaign, 2013). The narrator made statements about the need to follow rules and not engage in summary executions. The illustrator drew a scene of a blindfolded civilian man against a wall, and then an armed fighter appeared holding the civilian at gunpoint. The illustrator's hand moved the armed

fighter off the page, suggesting the behavior is unacceptable. The video concluded with the words fighter and *killer* in Arabic with the word for *no* in Arabic next to the word killer. The term killer was indirectly being tied to individuals committing summary killings and the word no signified that this was the unacceptable role. Thus, killer was used as a negative label, and it was implied that this role would decrease the opposition's legitimacy.

Benefits of compliance with international rules. The messaging approach also included advocating benefits or gains for following international rules regarding civilian targeting. The primary benefit the Swiss NGO conveyed was that the opposition can gain legitimacy. A Swiss NGO staff member commented on how this is framed stating:

It's about the gains and benefits of respecting IHL and respecting the Islamic rule but mainly we focus on IHL. You will be the good guys. You will be respected by the people. You will have more...popular support. You will show the difference between you and the opponents in this context and many other issues.

The Swiss NGO trainer expressed a similar response noting, "If they want to satisfy the international community being respectful and if you would like to respect the Syrian population because they are innocent they have nothing to do with this." Separately, a campaign video about not targeting medical support portrayed a scene of an illustrator drawing a Red Cross medical personnel loading a wounded person into an ambulance (Syria IHL, 2013). A targeting symbol appeared over the ambulance and the illustrator's hand moved the target off the page. The narrator conveyed, "Respect and protect medical personnel and objects." At the end of the video, the words fighter and killer appeared in Arabic with the Arabic word for no next to the word killer, and the narrator stated

“Fighter not a killer.” The combination of visual and audio messages implied that the opposition can be considered legitimate fighters by protecting medical personnel.

Another key benefit the Swiss NGO communicated was the military gains from not targeting civilians. The Swiss NGO trainer commented:

Sometimes, you give them also what is the benefit of targeting the civilian? You want to cause harm to the regime?...When you attack a civilian, how...can you harm the ability or power of the regime? It’s useless. I’m also teaching them what we call it “military economics.”

Separately, the training modules had a section on why fighters should “know” the rules, highlighting how it will improve their decision making in cases where they need to make quick judgments (“Introduction to the,” 2012). A later section of the training modules then discussed why combatants should “follow” the rules and bullet points noted “military effectiveness” and “reciprocity.” These two examples suggested that understanding and following rules governing civilian targeting could improve the opposition’s military capacity.

Relevancy of religious norms. In messaging conservative Islamic opposition groups, the Swiss NGO identified that these groups are not directly influenced by international law, so the organization primarily framed messages around Islamic law. The Swiss NGO trainer explained, “I’m going to present the Islam away from IHL...which is the international law. They look at it as this is western civilization. This is something the [west] is trying to impose on us.” He later elaborated that in reaching these groups he focuses the messaging on the intersection between international law and Islamic law saying, “When it comes to a group like Jabhat al Nusra for example, where

they are taught all these Islamic...half positions we focus on the Islamic law and Sharia and the factor of the law.” The Swiss NGO staff member confirmed this approach remarking, “For the Islamic ones they’re really interested in preserving this Islamic image of them. Even in their statements...this Islamic front announced a code of honor for all the ANSAs...about avoiding civilians and respecting human rights.”

Compliance with religious norms. In conveying messages about Islamic law, the Swiss NGO communicated that following international rules regarding civilian targeting is an extension of complying with Islamic rules or norms. A Swiss NGO trainer explained how he presents the relationship between complying with international and Islamic laws, “I present the set of law, and I try to present examples from the Sharia from Prophet Muhammad’s...from Qur’an....[W]e are talking same language...this is what Qur’an wanted, and this is exactly what IHL is asking for.” A Swiss NGO staff member also addressed this approach saying, “We relied on our trainers and experts who were able to make this link between Islamic law and IHL.” He later expanded on this point stating:

At any point, we will face questions about, this is what IHL says about this case. What does Islam say? They try always to remember or to remind that also we have our rules and let’s compare. This comparison actually is very good and very useful for us because even we learn from it and we develop our material depending on it.

Finally, training modules also reviewed the background of IHL, which included a reference to how Islam called for “The need to respect justice and equality as a fundamental principle of its humanitarian thinking” (“Introduction to the,” 2012). This

tenet demonstrated a connection between IHL and Islam and implied that Islam is based on principles that protect civilians.

Costs for non-compliance with religious norms. In messaging about the need to follow Islamic laws regarding civilian targeting, the Swiss NGO promoted the moral costs for non-compliance. The Swiss NGO trainer discussed how he presents moral costs noting:

If you don't obey IHL, actually you are violating IHL and the Sharia. Why are you fighting? To satisfy Allah, to satisfy death? But by not respecting the law...by attacking these people...you are...violating both laws....[W]hen the judgment day comes in heaven, you will be also sent to hell.

The Swiss NGO staff member also referenced the tactic of highlighting potential moral costs stating, "Violating IHL is violating Islamic rules. For them, it's very important and more important, the accountability of Islam is more important...than accountability of IHL."

Source characteristics. One of the main aspects of the Swiss NGO's organizational portrayal was its emphasis on its neutrality. In a 2012 conference report on messaging ANSAs, a description of the Swiss NGO stated it adheres to "principles of neutrality and impartiality" ("Engaging with armed," 2012). A Swiss NGO staff member also explained:

It is very important to convince the target group that we are neutral. We are not implementing or having the agenda of the other side. We're not standing on the side of one against the other....My business is just to help you to protect the population that you're dealing with or the civilians that you're dealing with. This

is very important because at the moment that you lose neutrality, we'll lose access and we'll lose the confidence that we built with the ANSAs and definitely will harm the objective that we're aiming to.

A different Swiss NGO staff member commented on how the organization disseminated campaign videos to both sides in the conflict in trying to depict its neutrality:

Even if our objective is toward the armed opposition, also, to show we are neutral, we also sent it to the government and government agencies. Then, we present the organization to the armed groups...we don't take [sides] or that we don't have political opinions at all. We just want them to improve their behavior regarding the protection of civilians and that's it.

The Swiss NGO's organizational portrayal was subtle within its messaging. Materials sometimes referenced organizational information, but only briefly in order to avoid creating perceptions of Western influence. For example, in the campaign video on not using prohibited weapons and methods, the only organization portrayal was the presentation of the NGO's logo in the final seconds of the video (Syria IHL, 2013). The Swiss NGO trainer provided an explanation of how the organization maintains a limited presence during training sessions noting:

So when it comes to the programs of [the NGO's name] this is something that we mention. We mention it briefly to the people that [the NGO's name] is doing this for the reasons...to encourage people to adhere to the law...

He later elaborated, "Sometimes it's just 15 to 20 minutes max at the beginning of the training but all the other materials like when we give them the brochures...we have [the

NGO's name] mentioned there.” A Swiss NGO staff member offered a separate example of how the organization originally omitted its logo from the campaign videos stating:

Initially when we created them we didn't put any logo and we didn't...broadcast it generally for the public. We created a specific YouTube page without our logo and without any mention of our organization because we are thinking...it was better to not to show too much that it's coming from Switzerland and the western part because I think for many of them, they are very reluctant to get any...advice...from the western part.

Lastly, in some cases, an essential part of the Swiss NGO's portrayal was its partnerships with other organizations that are deemed trustworthy by the opposition. These collaborations enabled the Swiss NGO to slowly build trust with opposition groups, who normally may be skeptical of a western organization. One of the Swiss NGO staff members described how interactions with some Islamic opposition groups entailed this approach commenting:

They have this sense in dealing with any foreigner, not only [the NGO's name]. For example, at the first meeting I remember where we met some of these, they completely refused to meet us alone. It was completely forbidden. They don't trust anything. They think that we are hiding some recorders or something like that. They insisted that we have other two to three people from different associations...that they trust and they deal with to be present in the meeting despite they don't have any role in this.

Another Swiss NGO staff member commented on this issue remarking, “We always work with local partners, so people that know very well the field that they may already have

contacts with the opposition groups.” He later expanded on the challenges of directly engaging the opposition saying:

They don’t trust you. That’s why we always go through a local organization that’s usually very close to these armed groups. The local organization...they’re very politically engaged with these groups usually but this is the way we come into contact with the groups when we start working with them.

Some of the Swiss NGO’s materials conveyed its other partnerships, such as its training booklet (“Fifteen key rules,” 2014). The back cover of the booklet had the Swiss NGO’s logo and contact information; the logo of one of its partners, which was another Swiss NGO; and the logo of one of its funders. Although these NGOs represented western organizations, their association with Switzerland, which is known for its neutrality, implied a neutral, united portrayal.

Strategies for gaining commitments and their outcomes. The Swiss NGO pursued several approaches in attempts to gain commitments from the opposition regarding ceasing civilian targeting. One of the main approaches involved unilateral or informal commitments, where opposition groups agree to make some type of internal change related to preventing civilian targeting. A Swiss NGO staff member described this approach relaying:

In the Syrian context until now, we use these kind of commitments trying to approach the ANSAs to have these unilateral commitments by declaring for example a code of conduct for their group, by announcing humanitarian statements, by declaring that we declare something on a specific issue...it’s a kind of self-declaration.

The Swiss NGO trainer also provided a similar account of these unilateral commitments remarking:

One of them is through encouraging the senior leadership of integrating IHL into the code of conduct. We conducted several training programs for senior leaders on how to do this and they started taking action. Their action being documented what is still call code of conduct that they have. Well, we comment on and we try to correct what they have written... .

One of the opposition authored documents provided an example of these unilateral commitments (Local Coordination Committees, 2012). It consisted of FSA units and Local Coordination Committees making several promises including not employing arms against civilians regardless of civilians' beliefs and complying with judicial proceedings if they broke any of the promises in the document. Finally, several participants commented how the organization has identified and trained opposition members to become trainers for teaching opposition elements about the rules of conflict. This practice of training trainers offered another way of internally promoting and instituting codes of conduct within opposition groups.

The second main approach entailed a formal commitment where an ANSA makes a written commitment to specific behavior changes and adopts responsibility for implementing these changes. One of the opposition authored conduct documents represented this formal, written commitment (Xelil, Naamat, & Saruxan, 2014). The signatories were three Kurdish groups: (a) the People's Protection Units (YPG), (b) the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), and (c) the Democratic Self-Administration in Rojava; they all formally pledged to outlaw the employment, creation, procurement, storing, and

delivery of landmines. They also agreed to participate in the termination of all mines, help individuals impacted by mines, facilitate mine education, and participate with other parties in examining how they are abiding by or violating their commitments. This example demonstrated how the Swiss NGO empowers armed groups to become part of the process in implementing commitments. However, the organization originally created these formal written agreements for well-organized, structured groups, which are atypical within the opposition. A Swiss NGO staff member explained:

Until now we didn't find an appropriate candidate for signing the [the Swiss NGO's formal commitment technique] until last two months because we did sign with the Kurds....[F]or the Kurds, it's different because they are stable. They are well organized....They have this chain of command from the first soldier at the border until the head and the general commander of the YPG.

A recurring theme that the Swiss NGO addressed in discussing commitment techniques was that they are a long-term process involving multiple players and significant trust building. A Swiss NGO staff member outlined how first the organization reaches out to opposition groups directly or indirectly, conducts initial messaging, and proceeds with some training. He then commented:

We move to the next step that we encourage the leaderships to have this kind of commitment and back also to the consequences whether its positive or negative. We try also to show them the consequences of such commitment and at the same time, of course we focus on the implementation of the commitment....[I]t's a kind of developing process.

The same staff member also highlighted the importance of working with others in the implementation phase remarking:

It's not only about engaging the ANSAs only....You work also with civil society organizations, the NGOs, the active groups because we consider them partners...in implementation, in pushing the groups to comply with their commitments and in monitoring also. We inform the ANSAs....The population is also our partners and they're watching you.

A different Swiss NGO staff member also discussed this point relaying:

We want to make sure that everybody, I mean the media, local organizations, all the relevant people in the country or their area know that they have signed...commitment so it puts a bit of pressure on them and also it helps us monitor the respect of this [the Swiss NGO's formal commitment technique]... .

U.S. NGO

The U.S. NGO is an international NGO that has its headquarters in the United States and regional offices around the world, including a presence in the Middle East. The organization conducts comprehensive investigations of violations of human rights, presents its findings, and advocates for victims. In the Syrian conflict, the U.S. NGO has directly reached out to the opposition about its civilian targeting and engaged other parties, such as the UN, Gulf states, and the wider international community, about ways to encourage the opposition to cease civilian targeting. One of the organization's Middle East experts has carried out primary research in Syria and neighboring countries on the opposition's practice of civilian targeting and created and delivered messages in attempts to persuade the opposition to cease this behavior. The results drew from this staff

member's input and an analysis of organizational full reports, press releases, and letters to relevant parties as well as opposition authored letters.

RQ1: How Are NGOs Disseminating Messages to the Syrian Opposition and International Actors Regarding the Need for the Opposition to Cease Killing and Harming Civilians?

Written communiqués. The primary channel that the U.S. NGO utilized to disseminate messages to the opposition and international actors about the opposition's practice of civilian targeting was written documents. These documents consisted of detailed full reports as well as shorter presentations, such as press releases, op-eds, and letters. Although these channels disseminated messages regarding accountability for all levels of the opposition, the messages mainly targeted the opposition's leadership. The U.S. NGO staff member remarked, "Our sort of principal way of communicating is with our writing with extensive reports, with press releases....We do write op-eds as well... ." An example of a shorter written communication was a letter the U.S. NGO sent in March 2012 to the leader of the FSA and President of the Syrian National Council regarding opposition abuses including abductions, torture, and killings (U.S. NGO regional leader, 2012).

Media and technological tools. The U.S. NGO also employed traditional media, such as television and radio, and social media technologies, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The U.S. NGO staff member commented on the array of tools used to document abuses and reach the opposition stating:

We use a range of social media tools, we use obviously Facebook and Twitter...to talk about our reporting and also talk about related...human rights issues. We

have a YouTube page where we post videos that we produced...that would allow the viewers [to] hear directly from a witness or a victim or a government official....

She later expanded the importance of the media as a channel remarking:

Our presence in the media on TV and the radio is very important to reaching people inside Syria....If you are on *Arabiya* or *Al Jazeera* then you exist....[W]e are able to get on *Arabiya* or *Al Jazeera*...because of all of the other things that we've produced... .

Varying message complexity. While the U.S. NGO presented simple messages within in its written communiqués to the opposition about ceasing civilian targeting, the format of some channels increased message complexity. The amount of detail the U.S. NGO presented in certain channels regarding specific opposition abuses and related legal codes heightened the complexity of the overall message presentation. Full reports provided very detailed accounts of the opposition's violations. For example, a full report presented succinct, direct messages to the opposition about ceasing civilian targeting and messages to the Syrian Opposition Coalition, UN Security Council, Turkey, Gulf States, and all other states about taking specific actions against opposition elements involved in the abuses in Latakia, Syria (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013). However, these concise messages were one section of a dense report, which also provided evidence of abuses drawn from witness statements, photos, videos, onsite investigations, and other open source material.

Alternatively, press releases and letters offered a shorter format and an overall more simplistic message presentation than extensive reports. One press release described

opposition abuses against pro-regime civilians and briefly outlined explanations of various legal codes, such as IHL, international human rights law, and the 1949 Geneva Conventions Common Article 3 (“Syria: End Opposition,” 2012). Additionally, a letter from the U.S. NGO to opposition leadership presented a few examples of opposition violations, including abductions, torture, and killings and messages that the opposition should criticize and prevent these illegal behaviors (U.S. NGO regional leader, 2012). While the press release and the letter offered some evidence to support the messaging, the format was much more succinct than the full report.

RQ2: What Types of Attitudes Are NGOs Trying to Change within the Syrian Opposition Related to Ceasing the Killing and Harming Civilians?

Negative attitudes towards civilians. The U.S. NGO did not specifically address what drives the opposition’s negative attitudes towards civilians that leads to civilian targeting; however, the U.S. NGO frequently referenced evidence of the opposition’s statements and behaviors that reflected that some opposition groups hold negative, notably harmful, views towards civilians. A full report on opposition abuses in Latakia, Syria cited one opposition member stating, “The villages fell so easily that the men were free to roam around and slaughter at their leisure...the Libyans [Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar] did not kill they slaughtered even women and elderly” (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013). Separately, a press release described how the opposition has detained or kidnapped activists, relief workers, and media personnel, elaborating that some civilians suffered imprisonment, torture, and even death for stating their beliefs or helping people in need of medical or other basic services (“Syria: Website to,” 2014). A letter from the U.S. NGO to the Egyptian Foreign Minister noted the IHL and human

rights abuses occurring in Syria (U.S. NGO issue leader and U.S. NGO regional leader, 2013). It highlighted that the opposition has committed killings, abductions, and torture.

Negative attitudes towards religious minorities. In addition to the opposition's harmful views towards civilians in general, the U.S. NGO identified that the opposition frequently exhibits these attitudes towards certain sub-groups of the civilian population. A recurring theme in the data was the targeting of certain religious sects, especially Alawites. A staff member from the U.S. NGO commented:

In Latakia countryside in August 2013, these series of groups...began executing or otherwise unlawfully killing civilians there; the fact that their being Alawite definitely contributed to the extent of the abuses that took place....There were reports indicating that over 200 individuals, mostly women and children, had been taken hostage....

Another example of harmful attitudes towards Alawites appeared in a press release where an opposition fighter in a video stated, "Oh my heroes of Baba Amr you slaughter the Alawites and take their hearts out to eat them" ("Syria: Brigade fighting," 2013). The article further described how the opposition fighter was in other videos conducting indiscriminate attacks on Lebanese Shia towns. A full report also described opposition attacks on Syrian Alawite communities in al Nassra, Kindisiya, Zraro, Beyt Sweiha, Jurat al Mai, Ayn Aghazal, and Mazraa and how one opposition group graffitied a civilian's house with the phrase, "The heroes of Khirbet al Jawz to the genocide of the Alawites" (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013). The words "slaughter" and "genocide" illustrated that some opposition elements hold strong, hostile views towards this sectarian group.

The U.S. NGO also presented evidence that some opposition groups have hostile attitudes towards Christians. A press release described how opposition elements used a man as a human shield telling him, “We kill Nasara (Christians)” (“Syria: Opposition abuses,” 2013). It also outlined how Jabhat al Nusra, Liwa al Huq, and Liwa al Tawhid destroyed Church property. Separately, a full report referenced how Christian civilians from Ghasaniyeh, Syria and Jdeideh, Syria and Shia civilians from Zarzour, Syria ran away in December 2012 when the opposition approached (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013). The opposition then destroyed property from Christian and Shia sites. These examples of the opposition using a Christian as a human shield and destroying Christian property revealed that some groups hold harmful views towards the Christian community.

Negative attitudes towards regime supporters. Another civilian sub-group the U.S. NGO identified that the opposition views negatively are individuals who support or are perceived to support the regime. In some cases, the U.S. NGO presented evidence where the opposition did not seem to distinguish between this civilian sub-group and Alawites. Yet, other evidence portrayed opposition elements holding hostile views of real or perceived regime supporters regardless of their sectarian identity. A press release discussed how opposition groups threatened attacks in regime-supportive neighborhoods or Alawite neighborhoods in Homs, Syria until the regime enabled the transportation of aid to areas it had under siege (“Syria: Car bombs,” 2014). In a full report, the U.S. NGO explained that Jabhat al Nusra killed Sheikh Bader Ghazzal, who was an Alawite, because he backed the regime and noted that the opposition group disseminated a video of the sheikh’s body, which had numerous stab wounds (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013). The full report also noted that the sheikh’s family member Fadl Ghazzal had served

Syrian President Assad's father, former Syrian President Hafez al Assad. Separately, a letter from the U.S. NGO to opposition leadership referenced evidence of how the Abu Issa group abducted and killed people associated with the government (U.S. NGO regional leader, 2012). The press release did not identify these people as combatants, so it seemed likely that they were civilians.

RQ3: What Kinds of Persuasive Techniques Are NGOs Using and Suggesting that International Actors Employ in Encouraging the Syrian Opposition to Cease Killing and Harming Civilians?

Relevancy of direct messaging to the opposition. The U.S. NGO reported that it tailors its messaging strategy to opposition groups based on the level of importance each group places on international, namely western, legitimacy and support. The organization relayed that it primarily utilizes direct messaging to engage opposition groups that care about international legitimacy and support. The U.S. NGO staff member described this approach:

For actors on the ground that do care...because they're receiving support from Western states who will stop giving them that assistance...or groups that are trying to gain international legitimacy, like for example the Kurdish Party...the PYD and its militant arm....With those actors, we can actually directly engage with them...encourage them to make changes...we have gotten some positive responses in terms of commitments...to end abuse and to investigate allegations of abuse.

Direct messaging about compliance and costs of noncompliance. In presenting direct messages to the opposition, the U.S. NGO mainly emphasized the

illegal nature of civilian targeting and the opposition's responsibility to comply with IHL. In a press release, the U.S. NGO outlined how the opposition carried out civilian executions, used a human shield, and targeted churches ("Syria: Opposition abuses," 2013). The NGO further conveyed that these behaviors are war crimes with one message stating, "The use of human shields...is prohibited under international humanitarian law. Combatants who deliberately use civilians as human shields to deter attacks on their forces are responsible for war crimes." A full report on Kurdish abuses contained a legal section that outlined that as the acting governing structure in Afrin, Ain al Arab, and Jazira, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) must abide by IHL and international human rights law, which forbids physical and mental abuse, arrests for no legal reason, and the need for impartial trials (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013). Additionally, it relayed the PYD's armed faction, the People's Protection Forces (YPG), is required to facilitate just judicial proceedings and violations of this privilege are war crimes. The U.S. NGO staff member confirmed that the messaging revolves around the need to comply with international laws noting, "The bottom line is always the same....[I]t's always that there is one standard and all parties are upheld to the same standard and we're pretty unwavering on that....[I]t is pretty straightforward....[I]ndiscriminate attacks are prohibited, period."

In directly messaging the opposition that it needs to comply with international laws regarding civilian targeting, the U.S. NGO presented costs that the opposition can endure for non-compliance. The main cost the organization promoted was the legal consequences including international criminal prosecution. A press release discussing the opposition's violations, including Jabhat al Nusra's car bombings in civilian areas,

noted that civilian targeting is a war crime and perpetrators can be charged anywhere (“Syria: Car bombs,” 2014). It further highlighted that leaders are legally responsible if they do not stop subordinates’ behavior or turn them in for legal prosecution. A full report presented a similar finding stating that opposition combatants from Ahrar al Sham, Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, Jabhat al Nusra, Jaish al Muhjireen wal Ansar, and Suqor al Izz who participated in or directed the civilian targeting in Latakia should be held criminally responsible (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013). These first two examples demonstrated the U.S. NGO directly messaging opposition factions about criminal costs; however, groups, such as Jabhat al Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, do not represent opposition factions that care about international legitimacy. Separately, a different full report discussed how the opposition cannot position fighters and infrastructure close to civilian areas (U.S. NGO regional leader, 2012). It further outlined that opposition members who were in or near Dar al Shifa hospital in Aleppo, Syria placed civilians in harms way, which is “a violation of the laws of war.” It noted that disregarding IHL can lead to criminal charges.

The U.S. NGO also called for opposition elements to criticize other opposition factions engaged in civilian targeting. By calling for opposition groups to denounce other groups’ practice of civilian targeting, the U.S. NGO attempted to impose internal costs where implicated groups would lose legitimacy and support within the opposition. A press release stated, “Military and civilian Syrian opposition leaders should immediately take all possible measures to end the use of torture and executions by opposition groups, including condemning and prohibiting such practices... .” (“Syria: A priority,” 2012). A full report recommended that opposition groups stop collaborating with factions that are

committing human rights violations against civilians and openly criticize civilian targeting and indiscriminate strikes by opposition elements (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013). Separately, in a letter from the U.S. NGO to the opposition, the NGO appealed to the Syrian National Coalition Military Bureau, as part of its mission to oversee and guide the opposition, to enforce IHL and human rights and to denounce violations (U.S. NGO regional leader, 2012). It also called for the opposition to denounce and prevent abductions, torture, and killings by opposition groups.

Relevancy of indirect messaging to third parties. The U.S. NGO presented that it primarily takes an indirect messaging approach for opposition factions that do not care about international, mainly western, legitimacy and support. The organization expressed that it engages other actors, who are perceived to carry influence with these opposition groups, on ways to decrease support to these groups due to their practice of civilian targeting. The U.S. NGO staff member explained:

When it comes to trying to limit the ability of these groups to conduct obvious abuses, what we do here is try to encourage other actors, maybe actors that are more rights protective or care more about their reputation, to not coordinate or cooperate with these groups. We also try to put more pressure on neighboring states and other states in the region particularly from the Gulf to not allow support, fighters, other assistance to come...to these groups.

This strategy also included encouraging other actors to pursue steps that may dissuade opposition elements from committing civilian targeting. The U.S. NGO staff member revealed:

When it comes to the deterrence, one of the main things we have been advocating for is credible accountability processes so that there is a credible threat that individuals may be held accountable for abuses....[W]e're really pushing for the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court....

Indirect messaging about pressuring the opposition. Similar to its direct messaging to the opposition, the U.S. NGO messaged other actors about ways to impose costs on the opposition for its practice of civilian targeting. As outlined above, a primary theme was the U.S. NGO calling for the UN Security Council to involve the International Criminal Court, so that criminal charges could be brought against opposition members engaged in civilian targeting. The messaging also called for other actors, including states, organizations, and businesses, to support this course of action. The previously noted statement from the U.S. NGO staff member, "We're really pushing for the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to International Criminal Court which would then have jurisdiction to investigate crimes perpetrated by all parties in the conflict" highlighted this approach. Additionally, a letter from the U.S. NGO to Kuwait's government called for Kuwait to back a Swiss proposal advocating for the UN Security Council to recommend that the International Criminal Court take action in Syria (U.S. NGO issue leader & U.S. NGO regional leader, 2013). A full report also included recommendations that states advocate that the UN Security Council recommend the International Criminal Court take action in Syria, because it is the body best positioned to examine and prosecute individuals responsible for the atrocities during the war (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013).

The U.S. NGO also called for other actors to publicly criticize the opposition's practice of civilian targeting. Public condemnations offered a mechanism for levying costs because they can decrease opposition groups' legitimacy and potential external support. A press release indirectly recommended that France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States openly criticize the opposition for IHL and human rights violations ("Syria: End opposition," 2012). Separately, in a full report, the U.S. NGO called for the League of Arab States; the Organization of Islamic Cooperation; and India, Brazil, and South Africa, who had seats on the Security Council at the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, to criticize the opposition and regime for IHL breaches (U.S. NGO staff member & U.S. NGO issue leader, 2013). A different full report promoted a similar message calling on Gulf States to openly criticize violations by the opposition and restrict support to Ahrar al Sham, Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, Jabhat al Nusra, Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar, and Suquor al Izz (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013).

Finally, the U.S. NGO encouraged other actors to cut material and non-material support as a means for imposing costs on the opposition. Material and non-material support included arms, training, funding, and the ability for opposition members and their supplies to transit countries. The U.S. NGO staff member noted:

We also try to put more pressure on neighboring states and other states in the region particularly from the Gulf to not allow support, fighters, other assistance to come into the country and to these groups. So really restricting the flows of the money and fighters to these groups.

A press release demonstrated this approach in that it called on the UN Security Council to implement an arms embargo, including banning weapons, training, and other support, to the regime and opposition elements who have participated in extensive human rights violations (“UN Security Council,” 2013). Separately, a full report outlined that Turkey should bolster law enforcement at its border to prevent combatants and weapons reaching groups who are tied to human rights violations (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013).

Source characteristics. The U.S. NGO’s authoritative expertise was one key characteristic of its organization’s portrayal. The organization’s authoritative expertise came across in its firm tone in the messaging, its extensive work in documenting the opposition’s practice of civilian targeting, and its presentation of international law regarding civilian targeting. Evidence of its firm, but informed stance, appeared in a press release that outlined how it had previously urged the UN Security Council to press the International Criminal Court to pursue action against war crimes in Syria (“Syria: Brigade fighting,” 2013). It also referenced studies and legal codes, notably the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court that states that disrespecting a corpse is a war crime. Separately, in a full report, the U.S. NGO presented in-depth examples of the opposition causing civilian death and harm in Latakia (U.S. NGO staff member, 2013). It detailed how the NGO examined photos of victims from Barouda, Syria whose bodies were burned; talked with a civilian in Nbeiteh, Syria who viewed an 80 year old victim’s dead body; and spoke with a medical staff member from Latakia hospital who relayed how a young female patient recounted that she witnessed her parents and four siblings being killed. The report’s messaging was stern with one message stating, “Immediately stop indiscriminate attacks and targeted attacks against civilians including summary and

extra-judicial killings.” Another telling example of the U.S. NGO portraying its knowledge appeared in its letter to opposition leadership where it acknowledged the complexity of the battlefield, highlighting that certain opposition groups may be outside the control of the Syrian National Coalition and its Military Bureau (U.S. NGO regional leader, 2012).

Another key characteristic in the U.S. NGO’s organizational portrayal was its emphasis on neutrality. The U.S. NGO staff member highlighted this point stating, “We always identify ourselves as an independent international human rights organization.” She later provided an example of her organization’s neutral approach explaining:

The PYD are...not nearly as egregious as what the government has done in terms of scope and severity. Regardless of that...we would condemn those violations just as we would condemn government violations. We don’t use the Syrian government as the standard, we use human rights laws standards.

In its full report on the PYD, the NGO further conveyed its impartiality providing evidence from multiple perspectives about alleged PYD abuses during protests in Amuda, Syria (U.S. NGO advisor & U.S. NGO staff member, 2014). It outlined evidence from both the PYD and PYD opposition parties and activists. A press release also displayed the U.S. NGO’s neutral approach where it called out both regime and opposition violations, noting that the government needs to cease using cluster munitions and barrel bombs and the opposition should cease employing car bombs and mortars (“Syria: Justice essential,” 2014).

The data also highlighted how the U.S. NGO sometimes collaborates with other partners in promoting messages. In these instances, the organization’s portrayal was not

independent but united with other organizations. Thirty seven human rights organizations, including the U.S. NGO, sent a letter to the Foreign Ministers of the UN Security Council members imploring them to call for a resolution that would order all sides to enable safe and unrestricted access for relief efforts in all parts of the country (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture et al., 2014). A press release exhibited a similar approach where the U.S. NGO partnered with 116 civil society groups to advise the U.N. Security Council to enable the International Criminal Court to take action in Syria (Action des Chretiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture et al., 2014). The U.S. NGO staff member confirmed this sourcing approach and the similar messaging strategies employed by its partners noting:

We do sort of partner with a number of different organizations. We used many of the same strategies or sorts of messages and in fact doing so...helps us to make the calls more robust or give them more weight like...being in line with one another.

This example further demonstrated the U.S. NGO's approach of sometimes partnering with other organizations to disseminate messages, and also that the organization believed that unified messages or similar messages from different organizations increase messages' effectiveness.

The last characteristic that defined the organization's portrayal was the degree to which it mentioned itself. Generally, the organization mentioned itself briefly. The U.S. NGO staff member touched on this point expressing:

We don't really make a fuss for being [the NGO's name] but sometimes it does come up and we do discuss it but it's usually really about, we're going into your

community because we're concerned about government indiscriminate acts...and we're here focusing on this issue and then proceed...on the basis of abuses that we're discussing more than who we are.

While the above example touched on a scenario involving the regime and not the opposition, it showed that the U.S. NGO's focus was addressing indiscriminate attacks not its organization portrayal. A press release complimented this result, showing varying degrees of the organization's name in its messaging ("Syria: Brigade fighting," 2013). A senior staff member commented, "One important way to stop Syria's daily horrors, from beheadings to mutilations to executions, is to strip all sides from their sense of impunity." A separate part of the same press release without mentioning the organization noted, "The laws of war prohibit any mutilation of dead bodies." The full reports had a similar format where one report stated, "To address the shortcomings, [the NGO's name] recommends the authorities take a number of steps. These include forming an independent commission to review the cases of those allegedly detained on political grounds... ." (U.S. NGO advisor & U.S. NGO staff member, 2014). A separate section outlined recommendations without mentioning the NGO's name or any other organizational information.

Strategies for gaining commitments and their outcomes. The U.S. NGO's primary mechanism for attempting to gain commitments from the opposition that it will cease civilian targeting entailed publishing opposition abuses and providing the opposition the opportunity to make a public commitment to correct the behavior. The publications typically involved written reports or letters regarding evidence of opposition groups killing or harming civilians. The U.S. NGO staff member explained:

We basically say that we documented these abuses, ask them to comment...let them know that if they make a commitment to investigate or if they make a commitment to end such attacks that we would publish that along with the report and suggest an indication that these abuses had occurred in the past but they made a commitment to stop them from happening in the future.

A full report provided another example detailing how the U.S. NGO had sent Asayish, the PYD's police force, a letter about alleged Asayish abuses (U.S. NGO advisor & U.S. NGO staff member, 2014). The letter asked about corrective actions, such as if members had been punished or charged for cases of torture and mistreatment of prisoners; if the organization was examining the events in Amuda where protestors were killed and, if so, where the process was and who was leading it; and if detainees had had legal trials. The letter promised to include Asayish's response in its impending report on the issue. In response, an Asayish commander addressed some of the issues, claiming that five members of the organization were punished for torturing prisoners and three for abuses against citizens, investigations were carried out, and that trials occurred for detainees. Separately, a press release described face-to-face discussions and a letter in which the U.S. NGO relayed to the opposition results and suggestions from its study about opposition violations and the opposition's subsequent response ("Syria: End opposition," 2012). The opposition's Military Council for the Aleppo Governorate replied in writing that based on the NGO's report it conveyed to FSA units that it is dedicated to humanitarian law and human rights, creating boards to examine prisons and detainee treatment, and enforcing accountability. Also, in discussions, local opposition leaders recognized evidence of prisoner abuse and claimed new facilities were being created to

address the problems. Yet, the press release noted that, despite these commitments, abuses persisted in the prisons.

Discussion

Comparison with Previous Research and Between the Swiss and U.S. NGOs

The literature presented numerous findings related to understanding and influencing ANSAs and Arab audiences' attitudes and behaviors but drew mostly from quantitative studies. The current study's qualitative approach expanded upon this earlier research and delved deeper into exploring how two NGOs utilized persuasive techniques in encouraging the Syrian opposition to cease civilian targeting. This section highlights similarities and differences between the literature and the current study as well as similarities and differences between the Swiss and U.S. NGOs' approaches.

Syrian information sources. Earlier research provided evidence that Syrian audiences with anti-regime views and refugee populations rely on informal networks, *Al Arabiya*, *Al Jazeera*, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for information (Charney & Quirk, 2014; Giovanni, 2013). The current study's results revealed that the Swiss and U.S. NGOs utilized some of these same channels in disseminating messages to the opposition. The U.S. NGO released messages via *Al Arabiya*, *Al Jazeera*, and Twitter, and both the Swiss and U.S. NGOs leveraged Facebook and YouTube. The Swiss NGO's results also showed that the opposition further disseminated the NGO's campaign videos through Facebook, Twitter, and *Al Arabiya*, confirming that these are information sources for the opposition. Additionally, given the similarity between the earlier studies' Syrian audiences and the opposition, it is plausible that the opposition also follows *Al Jazeera*, supporting the U.S. NGO's utilization of this channel to disseminate messages.

The current study's findings also revealed the importance that the Swiss NGO placed on meetings and trainings in reaching the opposition. These types of face-to-face

interactions were a key aspect of the Swiss NGO's messaging and offered a way to convey messages through the opposition's interpersonal networks.

Opposition's negative attitudes towards civilian sub-groups. Several previous studies addressed how in-groups' negative perceptions of out-groups can lead to inter-group hostility. Findings revealed how some opposition members viewed all Alawites, including civilians, as the enemy; other results highlighted how during the Rwandan conflict, in-group members were likely to see all out-group members as the same, specifically many Rwandan Hutus viewed all Rwandan Tutsi as the same and aligned with the Tutsi rebels (Civilians in Conflict, 2012; McDoom, 2012). The Swiss and U.S. NGO's findings on the opposition's negative attitudes towards civilian out-groups confirmed this earlier research. The Swiss NGO revealed how some opposition elements do not distinguish between the regime and certain civilian sub-groups, specifically Alawites and regime supporters, making these sub-groups aligned with the enemy (the regime) and leading to their targeting. The U.S. NGO also noted the opposition's hostile attitudes towards Alawites and regime supporters and highlighted harmful views towards Christian civilians. These findings revealed that the opposition's hostile attitudes towards out-groups, mainly civilian Alawites and regime supporters, contributed to inter-group hostility, specifically targeting of these civilians.

Audience segmentation. The literature review did not specifically address audience segmentation, but the current research did. The U.S. NGO reported that it directly engaged opposition groups that care about international legitimacy and law but reached out to third parties about ways to apply pressure to opposition groups that do not care about international legitimacy and law. In support of the latter approach, the

shaming literature highlighted how third party shaming had some success in decreasing political violence, including how human rights shaming coupled with third party shaming improved states' human rights behaviors (Krain, 2012; Murdie & Davis, 2012; Ruggeri & Burgoon, 2012). Compared to the U.S. NGO, the Swiss NGO primarily directly engaged opposition groups but tailored messaging depending on a group's views towards international and Islamic law. These different audience segmentation approaches were one of the main differences between the NGOs' persuasive messaging.

Persuasive messaging with costs highlighted through shaming. As noted above, earlier quantitative studies offered some evidence that shaming by external parties, such as UNHCR, human rights organizations, and the media can decrease political violence (Krain, 2012; Murdie & Davis, 2012; Ruggeri & Burgoon, 2012). The Swiss and U.S. NGOs also utilized shaming efforts in attempts to highlight the costs of civilian targeting and thus decrease this behavior within the opposition. The U.S. NGO directly messaged the opposition on the illegal nature of civilian targeting, specifically that it is a war crime and will result in criminal prosecution, and advocated for opposition groups to internally criticize factions engaging in civilian targeting. Furthermore, it called for states and organizations to support involving the International Criminal Court so it could levy criminal charges on opposition groups perpetrating abuses, publicly criticize the opposition's practice of civilian targeting, and decrease material and non-material support to implicated groups. Internal and external criticisms and decreased support reflected earlier traditional shaming approaches. Alternatively, the Swiss NGO's shaming techniques directed at the opposition also involved conveying the legal consequences of civilian targeting, such as criminal charges, and the loss of domestic

legitimacy; yet, it also employed a non-traditional shaming technique by advocating moral costs. Thus, while both organizations framed shaming messages around punishments and criticisms the opposition will endure for committing civilian targeting, their shaming approaches differed. The U.S. NGO's approach mainly aligned with earlier shaming techniques, while the Swiss NGO utilized more Syrian based shaming and incorporated moral costs.

Persuasive messaging promoting benefits. The previous section highlighted how the NGOs presented costs for civilian targeting and how they could be considered forms of shaming. The current study, specifically the Swiss NGO's messaging, also illuminated how to promote the benefits of ceasing civilian targeting. The Swiss NGO's messaging conveyed how the opposition could gain domestic and international legitimacy and military gains. The Swiss NGO's approach of presenting benefits and costs related to civilian targeting represented a key difference between its and the U.S. NGO's messaging, which solely stressed the costs. Furthermore, the literature review did not identify research on communicating the benefits of a behavior change to ANSAs. The Swiss NGO's findings offered new evidence based research for the literature on framing persuasive messages to ANSAs around the benefits of civilian protection.

Source effects. An earlier study addressing commitment techniques produced a finding on how non-biased mediators positively contributed to ANSAs' peace commitments (Svensson, 2007). Both NGOs underscored the importance of stressing their neutrality, which would align with the earlier study's approach of the benefits of using non-biased mediators. The U.S. NGO emphasized its neutrality by highlighting its independence, seeking out alternative explanations of potential opposition abuses, and

messaging all parties about ceasing civilian targeting. The Swiss NGO depicted its neutrality by disseminating campaign videos to all sides and noted how neutrality is key to gaining trust and influence with the opposition. These similar approaches supported the idea of how non-biased sources can potentially positively influence an ANSA's behaviors.

In contrast, the organizations differed in how they leveraged partnerships. The Swiss NGO to some degree attempted to get the opposition to view it positively. The Swiss NGO's engagement approach entailed partnering with local Syrian organizations that opposition groups trust. This approach enabled the Swiss NGO to gain access and eventually build trust with opposition groups, which typically distrust western organizations. Thus, the Swiss NGO's partnerships with trusted, local organizations led opposition groups to view the Swiss NGO more positively. Also, the Swiss NGO took a long-term approach at building trust with opposition groups, which may have further positively impacted its source credibility and made groups receptive to messages about civilian targeting. This finding somewhat confirmed an earlier study's finding that revealed how positive attitudes towards international sources contributed to adopting the source's domestic policy position (Dragojlovic, 2013). Alternatively, the U.S. NGO also partnered with other organizations to disseminate messages, but the intent differed. The partnerships served to amplify messaging and present a united front on communicating the costs of civilian targeting, such as urging the UN Security Council to enable the International Criminal Court to take action.

Commitment techniques. Earlier studies addressed how external and internal commitments positively contributed to influencing ANSAs and states' behaviors

(Manekin, 2013; Nilsson, 2008). External commitments were formal pledges ANSAs made to other parties, and the Swiss and U.S. NGOs employed commitment strategies similar to these techniques. These strategies included: (a) the Swiss NGO's formal commitment technique where an opposition group makes a written commitment to a specific behavior change and adopts responsibility for implementing the change and (b) the U.S. NGO's approach of presenting the opposition with evidence of its civilian targeting and then enabling opposition groups to make public commitments to rectify the behavior. Both organizations applied this approach with Kurdish armed factions, specifically the YPG and the Asayish.

Internal commitments involved members of ANSAs or armed state units pledging to follow internal codes and the enforcement of these behaviors. The Swiss NGO's unilateral commitments represented forms of earlier internal commitments and comprised codes of conduct, such as the FSA and Local Coordination Committees' document, opposition groups making public statements, and opposition groups conducting internal training on preventing civilian targeting. Additionally, the Swiss NGO took a long-term approach to securing different commitments from opposition groups and working with them to implement and monitor behavior changes.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The recommendations below offer ways communication practitioners can apply the study's findings to decrease the opposition's practice of civilian targeting. The suggestions have no hierarchy and their application may depend on an organization's goals, objectives, and resources. Additionally, while the recommendations are tailored to

the opposition, they may also help inform communication and program efforts aimed at influencing similar ANSAs, especially in the Middle East context.

Leverage primary channels the opposition follows. Messages intended for the opposition about ceasing civilian targeting should be disseminated through their primary media and social media channels, notably *Al Arabiya*, *Al Jazeera*, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and through interpersonal networks. The U.S. NGO discussed how it utilized *Al Arabiya* and *Al Jazeera*, and the influence these channels have in reaching Arab audiences. Also, the Swiss NGO noted how the opposition disseminated the NGO's campaign videos on *Al Arabiya*, and the literature review offered evidence of similar Syrian audiences following *Al Arabiya* and *Al Jazeera* (Giovanni, 2013). Both NGOs leveraged Facebook and YouTube, and the U.S. NGO also highlighted its use of Twitter. Lastly, the literature review provided support for similar Syrian audiences relying on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for information.

Additionally, the importance of interpersonal channels as a means for reaching the opposition cannot be overstated. Messages can be disseminated directly to opposition groups via interpersonal channels or indirectly through individuals who have contact with opposition groups. The Swiss NGO recounted how it primarily employed meetings and trainings in engaging the opposition about ceasing civilian targeting and how it leveraged local partners who opposition groups trust in initially reaching out to some groups.

Simple but captivating message designs for wider opposition audiences. To reach across opposition groups and wider Syrian audiences, message designs should be simple but appealing. The Swiss NGO relayed how the simple, short but attractive design of the video campaign appealed to many audiences. It also highlighted how future

channels, notably mobile apps, will allow opposition members to have an interactive, appealing experience in receiving messages about preventing civilian targeting.

Tailor channels to tiers within the opposition. Channels with simple message presentations, such as booklets and videos, offer ways to reach opposition fighters on the ground; means that allow for more complex formats, such as extensive reports and letters, can be effective for engaging opposition leaders. The Swiss NGO reported how booklets were simple ways for disseminating messages to opposition members in the field and that videos offered a way for reaching across opposition groups and to wider Syrian audiences. Alternatively, the U.S. NGO noted how written communiqués, such as full reports and letters, were their main mode for engaging the opposition, and their primary target audience was the leadership. Evidence showed different opposition leaders responding to the U.S. NGO's full reports and letters. Thus, channels that present concise, visually appealing messages may be effective for reaching fighters in the field, while channels that offer detailed, evidence-based messages may be effective for engaging the leadership.

Change attitudes by highlighting similarities. In efforts to positively change attitudes towards civilians, messages to the opposition could highlight that some opposition members and all Syrian civilians share similarities, such as a common national identity. Both NGOs addressed how opposition groups targeted two civilian sub-groups, Alawites and perceived or real regime supporters. The Swiss NGO described how the opposition perceives these civilian sub-groups as an extension of the regime. The literature review also noted evidence of how, in conflict settings, in-groups did not make distinctions between civilian out-groups and armed out-groups, making these civilian out-

groups a threat aligned with the enemy (Civilians in Conflict, 2012; McDoom 2012).

Messages could counter this perception by emphasizing links, notably national identity, which opposition and civilian sub-groups have in common. In becoming more aware that they share the same national identity, some opposition groups may view these civilian sub-groups as members of their in-group (Syrians) and be less inclined to engage in civilian targeting.

Segment opposition audiences. Given the complexity of the opposition's composition, opposition audiences could be segmented so that messages could be tailored to individual group's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes. One way to segment opposition audiences is by the value the groups place on international or Islamic laws. The Swiss NGO described how it primarily framed messages around international legitimacy and accountability for secular or moderate Islamic groups and mainly addressed Islamic law when reaching out to more conservative Islamic groups. These different messaging lines enabled the Swiss NGO to frame messages in ways that resonate with a group's values. Additionally, Levin, Nichols, and Johnson's theoretical research (as cited in Stiff & Mongeau, 2003) regarding value-relevant involvement argued that message receivers are likely to take an interest in messaging that is tied to their values. They reasoned that messages related to a receiver's values lead a receiver to convey or preserve his/her values. Thus, the Swiss NGO's approach of framing messages around the values of an opposition group, such as international accountability or Islamic law, contained support in the theoretical literature.

Another way to segment opposition audiences based on knowledge and attitudes is to identify a group's knowledge of laws regarding civilian targeting and its attitudes

towards civilians with perceived connections to the regime. Opposition groups that lack knowledge of the law and/or have extremely hostile views of civilians with perceived connections to the regime could first be messaged with information about international and Islamic laws regarding civilian targeting. Additionally, they could receive messages about the costs of committing civilian targeting and the benefits of preventing it. Other groups who hold more favorable attitudes towards civilians with perceived connections to the regime could receive messages about how to change their behaviors and adopt initial commitments towards civilian protection. Different groups have varying levels of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors towards civilians and messages should account for where these groups fall along the spectrum. The Swiss NGO incorporated this approach when it identified that some opposition groups were ready to make formal commitments to civilian protection, while others were only prepared to adopt unilateral commitments. The theoretical literature, specifically the Transtheoretical Model and its construct of the Stages of Change, proposed that behavior change occurs through a series of steps that does not always have a linear format (Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 2008). Furthermore, its construct of Process of Change argued that individuals employ different strategies as they proceed from one stage to the next, and the concept of Decisional Balance stated that individuals will consider the benefits and drawbacks of modifying their behavior. Therefore, the theoretical research offered support for segmenting opposition audiences based on the degree to which they understand laws regarding civilian targeting and the specific state of their attitudes (how negative or positive) and tailoring messages based on where they are in the process of changing their behavior.

Lastly, opposition audiences could be segmented based on their members' nationalities, mainly if they are Syrian or foreigners. Some of the conservative Islamic opposition groups with foreign fighters may be receptive to messages about Islamic law; yet, opposition groups with mostly foreign fighters, regardless of their religious values, may be unreceptive to messages about gaining or losing long-term legitimacy with the Syrian populace. Since they are not Syrians, foreign fighters may not be concerned with building popular support in Syria. Instead, messages could be tailored to the regional and national identities of these opposition groups. For example, groups composed of mostly North Africans could receive messages on how, by engaging in civilian targeting, they are committing atrocities similar to the abuses of previous North African dictators, such as former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Message the opposition about the costs of civilian targeting. Messaging efforts should communicate how by committing civilian targeting opposition groups will endure numerous costs including legal charges, decreased legitimacy, and moral costs. The U.S. and Swiss NGOs addressed how they conveyed the legal repercussions, including criminal prosecution, and decreased legitimacy the opposition will endure for civilian targeting. The Swiss NGO also highlighted the moral costs for civilian targeting. It is important to note that messages regarding moral costs must originate from credible sources who are Muslim and have knowledge of Islamic law. The Swiss NGO's messages regarding moral costs originated from a Muslim source, who is an expert in Islamic law, making him a credible source for this line of messaging. Additionally, the theoretical literature, notably the Health Belief Model (HBM), offered support for publicizing costs (Champion & Skinner, 2008). The HBM proposed that the likelihood

that an individual alters his/her behavior is a cognitive process affected by several factors, including the perceived barriers of a behavior. Perceived barriers were similar to costs where they represented the drawbacks of engaging in a specific behavior. Although this theory attempted to explain and offer ways to influence health behaviors, its construct of how costs can influence an individual's decision to engage in a behavior, offered further support for promoting messages around the costs of civilian targeting.

Other costs that could be promoted, which were not specifically addressed by the NGOs, are the economic costs Syria will endure for the loss of civilian life and the destruction of civilian property, such as hospitals, markets, and schools. Civilian targeting will only further decrease the number of Syrians with education and skills, which will be vital when the conflict ends and the country needs to be rebuilt. Also, the ongoing destruction of civilian infrastructure will increase the amount of time and resources it will take to rebuild Syria and increase Syria's dependence on foreign aid.

Message the opposition about the benefits of ceasing civilian targeting. In addition to promoting messages to the opposition about the costs for conducting civilian targeting, messages should also promote the benefits for not engaging in civilian targeting, such as obtaining legitimacy and military gains. The findings from the Swiss NGO illuminated how it presented benefits for protecting civilians, such as legitimacy and military gains, to the opposition. The aforementioned HBM also offered support for publicizing benefits (Champion & Skinner, 2008). The HBM argued that an individual's decision to adopt a behavior is also impacted by the perceived benefits of the behavior. This theoretical research provided additional support for advocating the benefits of not committing civilian targeting.

Another benefit related to military gains that could be promoted is that preventing civilian targeting could contribute to the longevity of opposition groups. ANSAs that do not have defined rules and regulations, such as rules regarding civilian targeting, are unstructured and vulnerable. Without such behavior codes, ANSAs like any group are prone to problems, such as leaders and members pursuing their own interests, disputing over strategy and tactics, and making inconsistent decisions. Opposition groups that are more structured, including those with rules governing civilian targeting, may be less likely to experience internal fracturing and preserve their existence.

Further highlight opposition groups that make commitments to civilian protection. In messaging about the benefits of gaining legitimacy for not conducting civilian targeting, messages could showcase opposition groups that have committed to protecting civilians and emphasize the importance of their oaths. These messages would need to be very tailored so that opposition groups received information about comparable, relevant groups. For example, more conservative Islamic groups could receive information about commitments to civilian protection other conservative Islamic groups have taken. This approach would draw on the persuasive techniques of (a) social proof which argued that individuals are influenced by others' conduct and (b) similarity principles which maintained that individuals are influenced by other individuals who are perceived as sharing similar qualities with them (Cialdini, 2009).

Encourage other actors to promote the costs and benefits to the opposition. By urging other parties to disseminate messages about the costs of civilian targeting and the benefits of civilian protection, communication practitioners can enhance direct messaging to the opposition and potentially reach opposition groups that are unreceptive

to direct messaging. Third party messaging should be tailored so that messages convey exactly how third parties can influence specific opposition groups, such as encouraging Gulf states and organizations to prevent funding from reaching opposition groups conducting civilian targeting. The U.S. NGO described how in targeting opposition groups that are not concerned about international legitimacy and law, it messaged other actors on ways to impose costs, such as levying criminal charges, making public criticisms, and cutting material and non-material support to these groups.

Synchronize messaging approaches. Organizations seeking to cease the opposition's practice of civilian targeting could collaborate to create and disseminate complimentary messages in efforts to further enhance messaging. One way to implement this recommendation is to disseminate messages to third parties about pursuing criminal charges prior to or during training sessions and meetings with opposition groups that are addressing the consequences of violating international law. Opposition groups would then see this line of messaging reinforced through multiple channels. The Swiss and U.S. NGOs both offered messaging approaches that present unique strengths. The U.S. NGO's third party messaging offered a way of applying pressure indirectly, while the Swiss NGO's direct messaging through meetings and trainings enabled it to build trust and influence with opposition groups. Also, both NGOs highlighted their partnerships and the value they place on working with others. Messaging efforts that simultaneously leverage different organizational approaches may offer opportunities to further influence the opposition's behavior toward civilians.

Limit the organizational footprint and stress neutrality. Messages to the opposition should limit an organization's portrayal as much as possible, and

organizations should stress their neutrality when presenting organizational information. The Swiss NGO's explanations of how some opposition groups distrust foreigners, particularly western organizations, emphasized the importance of minimizing western ties. Additionally, both NGOs presented themselves as neutral organizations, and the Swiss NGO recounted how this was key to obtaining trust with opposition groups.

Partner with existing trusted partners. Another avenue to bolster source credibility is to partner with existing trusted, local organizations. The Swiss NGO recounted how when it initially engaged opposition groups it relied on partnerships with local organizations, which opposition groups already trust. This approach helped the Swiss NGO gain access and trust with opposition groups that otherwise would have been skeptical and potentially unreceptive to a western organization's messaging.

Empower opposition groups to be participants in commitments to civilian protection. Commitment techniques should provide ways for opposition groups to both lead and participate in implementing commitments to civilian protection, such as participating in evaluation assessments. Empowering opposition groups to be active participants in implementing commitments can help these groups take ownership and sustain their commitments to protecting civilians. The Swiss NGO relayed how they utilized both unilateral and more formal written commitments in attempts to gain commitments from the opposition. These approaches included ways in which opposition groups would implement commitments. These techniques were adaptive and represented long-term approaches to instituting changes within opposition groups.

Study's Limitations

The current study had several limitations, especially regarding its sample due to language capabilities. While the case study offered an in-depth examination of how the Swiss and U.S. NGOs carried out persuasive messaging with the opposition, it was unfeasible to examine the U.S. NGO's Facebook and Twitter messaging, which were in Arabic. These results would have provided further insight on the U.S. NGO's persuasive messaging and the opportunity to compare this messaging with their traditional written communiqués. Also, it would have provided the chance to examine direct social media messaging to certain opposition leaders. Another limitation related to language capabilities was that the Swiss NGO's training modules and booklets were the English language versions. The Swiss NGO staff relayed that the materials were very similar to the Arabic versions presented to the opposition, but they did not offer an exact reflection of what the opposition received.

Other limitations related to the study's sample were its small size. The in-depth interviews included one interview with the U.S. NGO and three total interviews with the Swiss NGO and a training partner. While all of the participants' input was extremely valuable, the sample size was small for research purposes. Two other limitations related to the scope of the sample. First, there were potential opportunities to interview political opposition members and Syrian organizational partners. However, due to HIRB constraints, this opportunity could not be pursued. These results would have provided a Syrian perspective on the Swiss NGO's persuasive efforts, which would have been very valuable. Second, the U.S. NGO's messages to third parties utilized persuasive tactics in

attempts to influence these actors to take action. Given the study's scope, it was not possible to examine those persuasive efforts.

Lastly, the study utilized triangulation to address validity, however it did not account for personal biases in the data collection and analysis. The study's qualitative approach made the results subjective and additional measures, such as a daily journal that recorded how my opinions may have impacted the research and coding, could have helped strengthen the study's validity.

Future Research

The current study offered value in understanding how two NGOs are conducting persuasive messaging with the opposition that can inform ongoing and future communication efforts with the opposition and similar ANSAs. Future research could expand upon these findings and address some of the shortcomings of the study to further shape future messaging to the opposition and similar ANSAs.

Study on social media messaging. A qualitative content analysis could examine the U.S. NGO and other similar NGOs' Facebook, Twitter, and other social media messages to the opposition about ceasing civilian targeting. Furthermore, the study could examine the corresponding posts from the opposition. The findings would provide insight on how NGOs are framing social media messages to the opposition, the types of messages that may contribute to responses from the opposition, the opposition groups and members that are utilizing social media, and how these opposition factions are framing responses to the NGOs' messages. The findings revealing who within the opposition is utilizing these channels could inform audience segmentation for future social media

campaigns, so that messages are tailored to specific opposition groups and individuals. Moreover, the findings on message content could help shape the design of the messages.

Study on third party messaging. A qualitative content analysis could explore the U.S. NGO's messaging to third parties regarding the need to stop the opposition's practice of civilian targeting. As outlined above, the findings would reveal what persuasive techniques the U.S. NGO employs in attempts to influence these actors' behaviors that in-turn are meant to encourage the opposition to cease civilian targeting. The results would also offer takeaways on similarities and differences in the strategies the U.S. NGO employs depending on the type of third party. Communication practitioners could apply these lessons learned to future messaging efforts to third parties regarding the need to cease the opposition and similar ANSAs' behavior of civilian targeting.

Study on the opposition's responses to commitment techniques. A case study could examine how the opposition has responded to the Swiss and U.S. NGOs' commitment strategies. The study could produce an in-depth examination of internal and external documents regarding messages that the opposition has crafted and disseminated in response to formal and unilateral commitments to cease civilian targeting. It could also involve in-depth interviews with opposition leaders and members as well as with organizations working with opposition groups in implementing these commitments. One aspect that could be explored is how opposition groups' attitudes and behaviors reflect support for or violate these commitments. While these qualitative findings could not provide a measurement of the effectiveness of the commitment techniques, they could lend insight on how attitudes and behaviors towards civilian targeting may be shifting due in part to these commitment efforts. The results could be applied to inform other

commitment strategies that seek to positively influence the opposition and similar ANSAs' behaviors.

Study on the opposition's views of messages and channels. Surveys and focus groups could investigate how opposition members view NGOs' messages and channels about civilian targeting. The surveys could be administered following training sessions, while focus groups could be conducted with previous training participants. One specific aspect that could be explored in the focus groups is how opposition members view sources within messages and what would make sources appear more trustworthy. Surveys could also address which factors are likely to increase and decrease opposition members' trust in a message source and which channels (videos, booklets, PowerPoint sessions, studies, etc.) appear to contain credible information. The findings could inform future source and channel selection for messaging efforts targeting the opposition and similar ANSAs.

Study on changing attitudes. A long-term longitudinal study could utilize surveys and in-depth interviews to explore how opposition groups' attitudes towards civilians may change over time. Prior to training sessions, surveys could be administered to opposition members to determine how much they like or dislike civilians who have different sectarian, ethnic, political, and national identities and how likely they would be to target these civilian sub-groups. In-depth interviews could build off these questions, asking opposition members why they like or dislike civilian sub-groups and why they may be targeted. Following training sessions, the surveys and in-depth interviews could be readministered but also ask about how messages and channels impacted their attitudes towards civilians. For example, surveys could ask if role playing made opposition

members view civilian groups more favorably or less favorably; in-depth interviews could ask what opposition members thought about during role playing and how, if at all, their views have changed toward civilian sub-groups. These methods could then be reapplied a year later to examine opposition members' attitudes and how ongoing communication efforts, such as mobile apps, may have shaped them. This study would offer value in understanding how trainings and later messaging may have contributed to a shift in the opposition's attitudes over time. Practitioners could apply the findings to enhance or develop future messaging about ceasing civilian targeting that is intended for the opposition or similar ANSAs.

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Appendix A

In-Depth Interview Invitation

Greetings (Insert name of potential interview participant here),

My name is Alyssa Deffenbaugh, and I am a graduate student in the Communications program at Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC. I received your name and contact information from (name of person who recommended the participant). I am conducting a thesis study to look at how organizations are persuading the Syrian armed opposition to cease killing and harming civilians. The study's findings will help inform other communication professionals on how to positively influence the opposition and other armed non-state actors in the region. I would be very grateful for the opportunity to interview you for my study and believe your input would be very valuable. With your permission, I would record our discussion, but your identity would be kept confidential and your responses would not be connected with your name.

The interview would take place on whatever day and time works best for your schedule. I will be conducting the interviews over the Internet using Skype. Alternatively, if it is more convenient for you, I am happy to contact you at a mobile or landline number. The interview would take about an hour.

If you are interested in being interviewed or have any questions, please contact me by email at Alyssa.Deffenbaugh@gmail.com, by Skype at lyssd19, or by phone at 001-703-867-1386. Also please review the attached consent form and let me know if you have any questions. I will ask for your oral consent at the beginning of the interview.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Warm Regards,

Alyssa

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Appendix B

Qualitative Content Analysis Sheet

Instructions

For each artifact (videos, training booklet, training module, strategy document, conference report, opposition authored code of conduct documents, press releases, reports, and letters), answer the questions below where applicable. The following definitions explain some of the terms used in the questions.

Definitions

1. **Sectarian identity:** An individual's self-perception based on his/her actual or perceived membership in a religious sect. For example, a person may view himself/herself as a Sunni Muslim.
2. **Ethnic identity:** An individual's self-perception based on his/her actual or perceived membership in an ethnic group. For example, a person may view himself/herself as Arab or Kurdish.
3. **National identity:** An individual's self-perception based on his/her actual or perceived membership in a state. For example, a person may view himself/herself as Syrian.
4. **Compliance messages:** Communications that stressed ways groups would punish the opposition for committing civilian targeting or reward the opposition for preventing civilian targeting.

Questions

The first set of questions asks you to examine how the artifacts represent different means for delivering messages to the Syrian opposition.

1. What types of channels are NGOs using to reach the Syrian opposition regarding the need to cease killing and harming civilians?
2. What, if any, evidence exists of the Syrian opposition responding to messages delivered through certain channels?

The second set of questions asks you to examine how the artifacts address attitudes within the Syrian opposition towards the killing and harming of civilians.

1. What negative views, if any, do NGOs identify within the Syrian opposition towards civilians?
2. What positive views, if any, do NGOs identify within the Syrian opposition towards civilians?
3. What kinds of views, if any, do NGOs identify within the Syrian opposition towards civilians who support the regime? What kinds of views, if any, do NGOs identify within the Syrian opposition towards civilians who support the opposition?
4. What kinds of views, if any, do NGOs identify within the Syrian opposition towards civilians who have a different sectarian identity?
5. What kinds of views, if any, do NGOs identify within the Syrian opposition towards civilians who have a different ethnic identity?
6. What kind of views, if any, do NGOs identify within the Syrian opposition towards civilians who have a different national identity?

The last set of questions asks you to consider how the artifacts incorporate different persuasive techniques in encouraging the Syrian opposition to cease killing and harming civilians.

1. What types of, if any, compliance messages are NGOs conveying to the Syrian opposition about the killing and harming of civilians? What are the specific negative outcomes for killing and harming civilians? What are the specific positive outcomes for preventing the killing and harming of civilians?
2. What is the overall tone of the messages? Describe.
3. What, if at all, are NGOs proposing other international actors should do to impose costs on the Syrian opposition for killing and harming civilians?
4. What, if at all, are NGOs proposing other international actors should do to reward the Syrian opposition for preventing the killing and harming of civilians?
5. What types of symbols, such as text or images, do NGOs use to convey messages to encourage the Syrian opposition to cease killing and harming civilians?
6. Are messages conveyed in simple formats or with detail? Describe.
7. In what ways, if any, are NGOs gaining commitments from the Syrian opposition that they will cease the killing and harming of civilians?
8. How, if at all, has the Syrian opposition responded to these approaches?
9. How, if at all, do NGOs portray themselves in their messages to the Syrian opposition regarding the ceasing of killing and harming civilians?
10. Is organizational information presented simultaneously with messages about not killing and harming civilians? Or is it presented separately? Describe.

Appendix C

In-Depth Interview Guide

It is a pleasure to be speaking with you and thank you again for participating in my study. Our discussion should last about an hour. I have some questions I will be asking you, but before we start I want to ensure you that I will keep your identity confidential. Your name will not be connected with your responses.

Do you have any questions about the consent form that I emailed you? Do you give your consent to participate in the study? Also, do I have your permission to audio record this interview?

Lastly, if I have any questions regarding our discussion today, is it ok if I contact you with any follow-up questions?

1. To get started could you tell me briefly about your role in working issues regarding Syria and armed non-state actors?
2. As you know, my study specifically focuses on the Syrian armed opposition. Can you tell me about the oppositions' views towards civilians?
 - a. What kinds of views, if any, do opposition members have towards civilians who support the regime?
 - b. What kinds of views, if any, do opposition members have towards civilians who oppose the regime?
 - c. What kinds of views, if any, do opposition members have towards civilians who have a different sectarian identity?
 - d. What kinds of views, if any, do opposition members have towards civilians who have a different ethnic identity?
 - e. What kinds of views, if any, do opposition members have towards civilians who are not Syrian nationals?
3. Now, I want to ask you about the messages your organization puts out to the Syrian opposition. Can you tell me about the messages you are trying to convey to the opposition regarding the need to prevent the killing and harming of civilians?
 - a. How, if at all, are you framing messages around the costs for the continuation of this behavior?
 - b. How, if at all, are you framing messages around the benefits of ceasing this behavior?
 - c. Does the complexity of the message vary at all? If so, in what ways?
 - d. How, if at all, are you framing messages to other actors about the need to prevent the opposition from killing and harming civilians?

4. What made your organization adopt these particular messages?
 - a. Is it based off of your organization's policies, other organization's best practices, political guidelines, or some other factor? If so, could you describe how this decision was made?
5. What types of messages, if any, have been most effective in changing attitudes and behaviors within the opposition regarding preventing the killing and harming of civilians?
 - a. Can you explain what made these messages effective?
6. What approaches, if any, does your organization take to gain commitments from the opposition regarding their willingness not to target civilians?
7. Have certain approaches, if any, been more effective than others?
 - a. In what ways have these approaches been more effective?
8. How does your organization portray itself when it communicates with the opposition?
9. Lastly, I want to briefly ask you about how your organization disseminates messages. Can you talk about the means you have used to reach out to the opposition?
10. What made your organization select these means?
11. Have some means, if any, been more effective than others in reaching the opposition? For what reasons, do you think these means were more effective?

Curriculum Vitae

Alyssa Deffenbaugh received her Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice and Psychology from Temple University in 2002. She later joined the Department of Defense and spent seven years as an analyst focusing on counterterrorism and Middle East and North Africa regional issues and supporting policy and planning efforts. She built her substantive expertise around terrorist recruitment, leadership analysis, and group behavior and had the opportunity to travel and conduct research in the Middle East. Upon leaving the government, she spent a year and a half volunteering with a D.C. based non-profit organization to develop skills in grant writing and strategic planning for non-profit organizations. Her graduate coursework in the JHU MA in Communication program has focused on persuasion and behavior change concepts and how they can be applied to armed conflict settings.